Assessing the Effects of Input-based Task Repetition on Learners’ Second Language Request Downgraders

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Abstract

The present study evaluates the relative effectiveness of two types of repetition tasks in teaching polite request forms to 59 low to intermediate Japanese learners of English: similar task repetition (different referential and affective oriented activities) and same task repetition (identical referential and affective oriented activities). A treatment group performance was compared to a control group performance on pre-, post-, and follow-up tests comprising a discourse completion test and an acceptability judgment test. The results revealed that the two treatment groups outperformed the control group significantly, and while there was no significant difference between the two treatment groups in the acceptability judgment test, the same task repetition group performed significantly better than the similar task repetition group in the discourse completion test. The lack of significant difference between the two treatment groups in the acceptability judgment test suggests that effective learning occurs with task repetition activities in teaching second language (L2) polite request forms. In addition, a significant difference between the two treatment groups in the discourse completion test implies that same task repetition stimulates deeper perceptual and mental processing than similar task repetition.

Keywords: task repetition, same task repetition, similar task repetition, pragmatic proficiency

Introduction

Some of the intervention studies in teaching second language (L2) pragmatics have demonstrated that pragmatic features can be taught explicitly with some sort of input enhancement activities and have provided some evidence that high levels of attention-drawing activities are more useful for L2 pragmatic learning than mere exposure to positive evidence (Alcón & Martínez-Flor, 2008; Jeon & Kaya, 2006). For example, Rose and Ng’s (2001) study focused on deductive and inductive approaches to teaching compliments and compliment responses to a group of English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) learners. Takimoto (2009) analyzed learners’ requests after a structured input task and a problem-solving task, while Takahashi (2001, 2005) made a comparison of non-native speakers’ requests after four different input enhancement activities and native speakers’ requests. Among the studies that investigated the effects of high levels of attention-drawing activities, participants in Takimoto’s (2009) study began by using memorized expressions and were later able to analyze the expressions through repeated practice.

While there is empirical evidence for the effectiveness of repeated practice in acquiring L2 grammatical competence, repeated practice is still an under-researched
area in L2 pragmatics. As pragmatic competence is just as important a component of communicative competence as grammatical competence is, research on the pragmatic aspect of learning and repeated exposure is of vital concern and more research is necessary in order to gain an insight into unexplored areas of L2 pragmatics. The present study examines the effectiveness of input-based task repetition in teaching L2 polite request forms.

**Repeated Practice and L2 Grammar**

There has been some evidence for how repeated practice can develop learners’ L2 performance. Bygate (1996, 2001) compared a single learner’s narration of a *Tom and Jerry* cartoon on two separate occasions. Bygate (2001) suggests that task repetition with the same content would have beneficial effects on learners’ performance because it led learners to first focus on message content and then switch their attention to the selection and monitoring of appropriate language use.

Examining learners’ use of L2 Spanish in the same and different content groups, Gass, Mackey, Alvarez-Torres, and Fernández-García (1999) reported similar findings. Participants in one content group watched the same Mr. Bean episode three times, while participants in another content group saw a different Mr. Bean episode each time. They argue that task repetition, especially with the same content, frees up the participants’ attention to meaning and allows them to gain greater control over their linguistic knowledge. However, there did appear to be no transfer of these repetition effects to a new task of the same type. Gass et al. explained that, at some point in the study, the novelty of the task might have ended, and participants’ disinterest settled in. Plough and Gass (1993) suggest that when carrying out task-based instruction in a classroom, learners can easily become disinterested in engaging in the same task repeatedly.

Although the claim that task repetition has a positive effect on learners’ performance in promoting L2 grammatical development is arguable, as far as the above studies are concerned, the present study is interested in knowing whether empirical evidence in L2 performance can be applicable to L2 pragmatics. In addition, as empirical investigations of task repetition are still under-represented in L2 pragmatics, further studies are needed to document the effectiveness of task repetition not only in the field of L2 performance, but also in L2 pragmatics.

**Input Enhancement Studies of L2 Pragmatics**

As mentioned in the previous section, some of the intervention studies in teaching L2 pragmatics have employed input enhancement approaches. Sharwood Smith (1993) coins the term input enhancement and explains that it is an externally induced technique that attempts to make target features of the input more salient for learners in such a way as to facilitate acquisition. It includes, but is not limited to, a number of techniques such as slowing down the rate of speech and using more repetition, gestures, visual stimuli, and videos. Input enhancement also includes explicit, more traditional approaches which draw learners’ attention more overtly to how the target features are used. In L2 pragmatics, input enhancement took place through the use of videos in Rose and Ng (2001), repetition of input-based tasks in Takimoto (2009), and target pragmatic features were enhanced through explicit,

In a study on instructional effectiveness with 103 advanced EFL learners, Rose and Ng (2001) examine the effectiveness of deductive and inductive approaches to teaching compliments and compliment responses with three questionnaires: self-assessment questionnaires, discourse completion questionnaires, and metapragmatic questionnaires. The three questionnaires helped delve into the learners’ pragmalinguistic proficiency, i.e., knowledge of the strategies for realizing speech intentions and the linguistic items used to express these intentions (Leech, 1983; Thomas, 1983), and sociopragmatic proficiency, i.e., knowledge of the social conditions governing language (Leech, 1983; Thomas, 1983). After six 30-minute lessons, the results of the three questionnaires indicated that while both deductive and inductive treatment groups experienced gains in pragmalinguistic proficiency, only the deductive group effectively developed sociopragmatic proficiency.

In another study on instructional effectiveness, Takahashi (2001) conducted an experimental study with 138 Japanese college students, proposing four input enhancement conditions: explicit instruction, form-comparison, form-search, and meaning-focused conditions. After four weeks of instruction at 90 minutes per week, discourse completion tests and self-reports indicated that the explicit treatment group learned all of the request strategies more successfully than the other three experimental groups. 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 to 49 Japanese college students. After four weeks of 90-minute weekly lessons, discourse completion tests and self-reports revealed that students in the form-comparison condition outperformed students in the form-search condition on all request strategies.

Although these results have showed that explicit instruction can be effective in general and that there is a need to integrate both pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic knowledge in an input-based approach to teaching L2 pragmatics, these studies were conducted within the framework of explicit and implicit instruction, and none of them examine the effects of task repetition. Takimoto (2009) evaluates the relative effectiveness of three types of input-based approaches in teaching English polite request forms to 60 Japanese learners of English: (a) structured input tasks with explicit information; (b) problem-solving tasks; and (c) structured input tasks without explicit information. These three types of input-based tasks were repeated to make the initial input enhancement more effective. Pre-tests, post-tests, and follow-up tests consisting of a discourse completion test, a role-play test, a listening test, and an acceptability judgment test, revealed that the three treatment groups performed significantly better than the control group, and that task repetition with similar content was conducive to an improvement in the participants’ pragmatic proficiency to some extent.

As shown in the above studies on L2 pragmatics, input enhancement instruction can be effective, and the study by Takimoto (2009) seems to provide some evidence for the benefit of input-based task repetition with similar content in teaching L2 pragmatics. However, in light of the questions raised in the previous sections, more research is needed to investigate the relative effectiveness of input-based task...
repetition in teaching L2 pragmatics, and such research should examine the relative effectiveness of same task repetition and similar task repetition. The type of input enhancement in the present study is therefore task repetition which involves structured input task, excluding mere exposure to the target features.

**Structured Input**

A structured input task occupies a significant part in processing instruction. According to VanPatten (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)

A number of L2 grammar teaching studies have provided empirical evidence that structural input tasks themselves, without proactive explicit information, are very effective in improving learners’ L2 grammatical proficiency level (e.g., VanPatten & Oikennon, 1996; Wong, 2003).

Ellis (1997) argues that structured input texts need to be designed in such a way that the target forms are frequent, the meaning of the target form is clear, and comprehending the target features is essential for understanding the whole text. The present study adopts the structured input tasks proposed by Ellis (1997), and the tasks are defined as activities designed to invite learners to engage in intentional learning by consciously noticing how a target pragmatic expression is used in specifically designed input with numerous exemplars of the structure. One of the key issues here is how structured input can be extended to the teaching of L2 pragmatics. In order to teach L2 pragmatics, the present study aims at learners’ conscious noticing of not only the relationship between forms and meanings of target structures, but also the relationship between strategies for realizing speech intentions, linguistic forms used to express these intentions and social conditions governing language use.

**The Present Study**

The present study focuses on the effectiveness of same task repetition and similar task repetition in recognizing and producing L2 request downgraders. It employed a structured input task consisting of two types of activities: referential oriented activities and affective oriented activities, and the following research question is addressed:

What is the relative effectiveness of similar task repetition and same task repetition in enhancing participants’ abilities to recognize and produce English request downgraders?
**Participants**

Fifty-nine university students in three intact classes (three sophomore listening comprehension classes) at a university in Japan took part in the present study. Participants were non-English majors, studying in the College of Science and Engineering, and were unaware that English lexical and syntactic downgraders were the focus of the study. Participants’ English proficiency level was judged to be at the low to intermediate level, as defined by a TOEIC score of 300–700. Participants were randomly assigned to two treatment groups and one control group. The two experimental groups received the following instructional treatments: similar task repetition (IT) \((n = 22; \text{male } = 17, \text{female } = 5)\) and same task repetition (AT) \((n = 19; \text{male } = 19, \text{female } = 0)\). The control group comprised 18 participants \((\text{male } = 13, \text{female } = 5)\). Participants’ first language was Japanese, and their average age was 20 years. Most participants had studied English for 8 years at schools in Japan.

**Target Structures**

The present study drew on past research on Japanese students’ acquisition of request downgraders and mitigated request forms in English (Hill, 1997; Takahashi, 1996). Takahashi (1996) found that Japanese learners of English were inclined to use monoclausal English request forms when in fact downgrader biclausal request forms would have been more appropriate, e.g., *Would/Could you VP?* vs. *Would it be possible to VP?* In addition, Hill (1997) found that even as the proficiency of Japanese learners of English increased, they still continued to underuse clausal downgraders, lexical downgraders, and syntactic downgraders. Given Takahashi (1996) and Hill’s (1997) findings, the present study focused on teaching syntactic and lexical/clausal downgraders in English request forms. A list of downgraders used in the present study is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*List of downgraders used in the present study*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Syntactic downgraders</strong></th>
<th><strong>Examples</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Continuous aspect</td>
<td>I <em>am wondering</em> if you could lend me a book.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past tense</td>
<td>I <em>wondered</em> if you could come.</td>
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<th><strong>Lexical and clausal downgraders</strong></th>
<th><strong>Examples</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>Downtoner</td>
<td>I would appreciate it if you could <em>possibly</em> come here.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitigated-preparatory questions</td>
<td><em>Would it be possible</em> to come here?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitigated-preparatory statements</td>
<td>I <em>wonder</em> if you could come here.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitigated-want statements</td>
<td>I <em>would appreciate it if</em> you could come here.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Instructional Treatments**

Each teaching session for the two treatment groups and the control group lasted for 20 minutes, and the instructor gave all directions in Japanese during the instruction. Sessions were conducted by the same instructor once a week for four weeks in three intact classes at a university in Japan. The instructor was also the researcher.
Treatment for the similar task repetition group consisted of one referential oriented activity, which is a kind of objective activities not influenced by personal feelings or opinion, and one affective oriented activity, which is subjective and based on personal feelings or opinion. Examples of the referential and affective oriented activities are in the appendix. During the activities, participants were encouraged to attend to not only the relationship between the forms and meanings of the target features, but also three sociolinguistic variables, namely the status of the speaker with respect to the hearer, the difficulty that the speaker experiences when asking the hearer to perform the request, and the relationship between the speaker and the hearer, and the pragmalinguistic variable, namely the strategies for realizing requestive intentions and linguistic items used by the speaker to express these intentions of the target structures to the hearer. Before the activities, the participants received handouts with both referential oriented activities and affective oriented activities. In the referential oriented activities, participants read situations and dialogues related to other people’s lives and then rated two underlined request forms and chose the more appropriate form. After choosing the form on their own, participants listened to an oral recording of the dialogue and underlined the actual request a native speaker used in the recording. 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 5-point Likert scale.

Treatment for the same task repetition group also comprised one referential oriented activity and one affective oriented activity. The difference between the similar task repetition treatment and the same task repetition treatment is that participants in the similar task repetition group engaged in different referential and affective oriented activities with similar content in each class, while participants in the same task repetition group repeated engagement in the same referential and affective oriented activities in each class.

The two treatment groups spent 10 minutes on each activity in the input-based task, with both groups having the same amount of activities. No extra activities containing the target pragmatic features were provided. Each participant in the experimental groups engaged in the activities individually, with no explicit explanations. In addition, the two instructional treatments were matched for target pragmatic structures. That is, the first and third class for the two treatment groups were spent on lexical/clausal downgraders in English requests, while the second and fourth classes were spent on syntactic downgraders.

Lessons for the control group were designed to help participants learn new English words and phrases. Participants in the control group were exposed to the target structures during the lessons, but no explanation was added about the target structures and participants did not engage in any structured input tasks.

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 a week prior to the first instructional treatment, the post-test a week after the treatments, and the follow-up test in the second week following the treatments. Each test consisted of
an acceptability judgment test (AJT) and a discourse completion test (DCT). The test items did not overlap with the treatment materials.

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), Imposition (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 selected 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 (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The study focused on situations with a high level of imposition combined with power (i.e., the status of the hearer is higher than that of the speaker, or the status of the speaker and the hearer are equal) and distance (i.e., the relationship between the speaker and the hearer is not close). This is because English downgraders tend to be used in situations with a high level of imposition (Hill, 1997; Hudson, Detmer, & Brown, 1992, 1995; Takahashi, 2001). Situations with a low level of imposition 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 Imposition items and 10 Low Imposition items.

The situations with high levels of imposition were modified from items validated by Hill (1997), Hudson, Detmer, and Brown (1992, 1995) and Takahashi (2001). Three versions of the discourse completion test and the acceptability judgment test were developed and 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, and then the acceptability judgment test. The acceptability judgment test was administered second in order to avoid providing the participants with models that could be used in the discourse completion test.

**Discourse completion test (DCT)**

The discourse completion test was a planned written-production test which 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 American English rated the appropriateness of the request forms on a 5-point Likert scale. Although participants were allowed to use any request form, an answer that reflected the most appropriate use of downgraders in participants’ requests was given five points. As there were 10 High Imposition items in the test, the maximum score was 50 points. One sample item 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, 2001)

(Note: imposition = +; power = −; distance = +; + = more; − = less; ± = equal)

You: _____________________________________________________________

Acceptability judgment test (AJT)

The acceptability judgment test was a planned written-judgment test which required participants to read written descriptions of 20 situations in English. Participants received three isolated requests, one at a time, which they rated on an 11-point scale. Participants who rated the three requests in line with the acceptability judgment of native English speakers were awarded five points. Participants who did not rate all three requests in line with native English speakers were awarded no points. As there were 10 High Imposition items in the test, the maximum score was 50 points. One sample item is shown below.

You overslept and missed the final exam for Professor Jackson’s course. You are not so familiar with Professor Jackson and you know that Professor Jackson has to hand in students’ grades in a few days and does not like to offer students a make-up exam. However, you need to pass the final exam to graduate and you have decided to go and ask Professor Jackson to give you a make-up exam. What would you ask Professor Jackson? (based on Takahashi, 2001)

(Note: imposition = +; power = −; distance = +; + = more; − = less; ± = equal)

a: I was wondering if it would be possible for me to have a make-up exam.
not appropriate at all 0—1—2—3—4—5—6—7—8—9—10 completely appropriate
b: I want you to give me a make-up exam.
not appropriate at all 0—1—2—3—4—5—6—7—8—9—10 completely appropriate
c: Could you possibly give me a make-up exam?
not appropriate at all 0—1—2—3—4—5—6—7—8—9—10 completely appropriate

Statistical Analysis of Data

Interrater reliability was estimated by examining the extent to which the raters’ scores correlated with each other. The correlation coefficients for the DCT were .995, which was statistically significant (p < .001).

With regard to internal consistency, average Cronbach alpha reliability estimates for the three test forms of the discourse completion test and acceptability judgment test were calculated. They were .859 and .894 respectively, showing a fairly high internal consistency for the two tests.

Content validity was examined instead of criterion and construct validity due to the small number of cases. To ensure content validity, test items were carefully
planned and matched to a theoretical framework based on imposition, power and distance variables proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987). Table 2 indicates the variable distribution across tests.

Table 2

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Note. S = Situation; I = Imposition; P = Power; D = Distance; + = More; − = Less; ± = Equal

Results

The following section summarizes the results of each test instrument. For homogeneity of variance, a Levene test in SPSS was conducted, and the results showed an equal $F = 1.44, p = .245$ for the discourse completion test and $F = 4.09, p = .072$ for the acceptability judgment test, meaning that the homogeneity of variance assumptions was met. The normality assumption was also checked through SPSS and it did not indicate a violation of the normality assumption. The overall alpha level was set at .05. In order to address the multiple comparisons (the discourse completion test and the acceptability judgment test), the Bonferroni correction was used and the overall alpha level was divided by 2.

Results from the Discourse Completion Test (DCT)

Results of a two-way ANOVA with repeated-measures (Figure 1) showed a significant main effect for Instruction (the IT, AT, and control) [$F (2, 56) = 16.54, p = .000 < .025, \text{Eta}^2 = .371$], a significant main effect for Time (the pre-test, post-test, and follow-up test) [$F (2, 56) = 23.99, p = .000 < .025, \text{Eta}^2 = .300$], and a significant interaction effect between Instruction and Time [$F (4, 56) = 6.41, p = .000 < .025, \text{Eta}^2 = .186$]. Results of the one-way ANOVA analysis in Figure 1 indicated that, although there were no statistically significant differences among the three groups on the pre-test scores [$F (2, 56) = 2.92, p = .062 > .025, \text{Eta}^2 = .094$], the two treatment groups showed gains from the pre-test to the post-test and further gains from the post-test to the follow-up test, as revealed by a two-way ANOVA with repeated-measures [$F (1, 39) = 3.00, p = .024 < .025, \text{Eta}^2 = .051$]. The post-hoc Scheffé tests for the main effect of treatment showed the following contrasts: (a) the two treatment groups performed significantly better than the control group on the post-test and follow-up test; (b) the same task repetition (AT) group performed significantly better than the similar task (IT) group on the post-test and follow-up test.
Similar to the discourse completion test, the results of a two-way repeated-measures ANOVA for the acceptability judgment test (Figure 2) revealed a significant main effect for Instruction (the IT, AT, and control) \( F (2, 56) = 28.41, p = .000 < .025, \text{Eta}^2 = .054 \), a significant main effect for Time \( F (2, 56) = 159.58, p = .000 < .025, \text{Eta}^2 = .740 \), and a significant interaction effect between Instruction and Time \( F (4, 56) = 35.03, p = .000 < .025, \text{Eta}^2 = .556 \). The results displayed in Figure 2 indicate that although there were no statistically significant differences among the three groups in a one-way ANOVA analysis of the pre-test scores \( F (2, 56) = .098, p = .907 > .025, \text{Eta}^2 = .003 \), the two treatment groups made significant gains from the pre-test to the post-test and the follow-up test, and positive effects for the two treatments between the post-test and the follow-up test were maintained, as evidenced by results from a two-way ANOVA with repeated-measures \( F (1, 39) = .601, p = .443 > .025, \text{Eta}^2 = .015 \). The post-hoc Scheffé tests for the main effect of treatment on the acceptability judgment test revealed the following contrasts: (a) the two treatment groups performed significantly better than the control group; (b) there were no statistically significant differences between the two treatment groups.
Discussion

The research question in the present study is concerned with the effectiveness of similar and same task repetition in participants’ recognition and production of English request downgraders. The results indicated that the two treatment groups outperformed the control group in a discourse completion test and an acceptability judgment test.

As no information regarding the psycholinguistic processing involved in either the treatments or the tests was available, explanations of the results had to be speculative in nature. During the referential oriented activities, participants in the same and similar task repetition groups had to discover the rules for themselves by attending to not only the relationship between the forms and meanings of the target features, but also the sociopragmatic features and pragmalinguistic features of the target pragmatic structures. Then they had to choose the more appropriate of the two pragmalinguistic request forms, an exercise that was designed to raise their awareness about pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic meanings. In the affective oriented activities, participants were instructed to rate the level of appropriateness of each bold-faced underlined pragmalinguistic request form, which highlighted the need to pay attention to its pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic meanings.

Craik and Lockhart (1972) and Craik (2002) claim that the quality of a memory trace relies on the level or depth of perceptual and mental processing where meaning plays a vital role. Meaning, in this case, includes both pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic meaning. In other words, when participants focused more on the pragmalinguistic-sociopragmatic connections of the target features, they tended to process them at deeper levels. Both the referential and affective oriented activities in the present study were designed to focus participants’ attention on the pragmalinguistic-sociopragmatic connections by requiring the participants to access...
and integrate their pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic knowledge. Thus, it is likely that the referential and affective oriented activities promoted greater depth of processing, resulting in improved pragmatic proficiency.

Furthermore, the treatments in the two experimental groups were repeated in view of Sharwood Smith’s (1993) suggestion that initial enhancement becomes more effective through repeated exposure. Skehan (1998) explains that L2 learning is based on a process where syntacticization operates on initially memorized expressions and later develops into the rule-based system. Furthermore, Taguchi (2008) suggests that engaging in memorized expressions reduces the processing load for learners and frees up memory space for additional information. Accordingly, it could be assumed that participants tried to memorize the target pragmatic expressions, directing their attention to the pragmalinguistic-sociopragmatic features of the target pragmatic expressions during their repeated exposure. Consolidated memorized expressions through their repeated exposure might have guided participants to analyze and derive rules of the target pragmatic features, internalizing the expressions in their rule-based systems.

At issue here is why the same task repetition group performed significantly better than the similar task repetition group in the discourse completion test, while the two treatment groups performed similarly on the acceptability judgment test. The study by Gass et al. (1999) imply that the same task repetition allows learners to familiarize themselves with the activity content more easily and it automatically frees up learners’ memory space, directing learners’ attention to additional information, which results in gaining greater control over their linguistic knowledge. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that although participants in the two treatment groups were able to develop receptive knowledge about the target structures (as revealed by the acceptability judgment test), participants in the same task repetition group attended to the pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic resources of the target structures more deeply than their counterparts in the similar task repetition group, thereby developing explicit knowledge that was more firmly embedded and thus more easily accessed in the discourse completion test. Participants in the similar task repetition group were not able to cope with the discourse completion test to the same extent because the demands of the test were taxing on their working memories, making it difficult for them to access their more weakly established explicit knowledge.

In addition, as far as the present study is concerned, the results refuted the suggestion by Plough and Gass (1993) that when task-based instruction in a classroom is conducted, learners are inclined to become somewhat disinterested in engaging in the same task repeatedly. The results indicated that the two treatment groups gained significantly from the pre-test to the post-test and maintained the positive effects between the post-test and the follow-up tests, which implies that the novelty of the task did not end and participants’ interest in learning English request downgraders was maintained all through the follow-up tests. This evidence attests to the necessity of keeping up the novelty of the task and stimulating learners’ interest in the target pragmatic features of the developing learners’ pragmatic controlled processing skill.
Conclusion

The present study has examined the relative effectiveness of different types of task repetition in recognizing and producing L2 request downgraders. The results showed that task repetition involving processing of the target pragmatic features through pragmalinguistic-sociopragmatic connections had a strong impact on the recognition and production of L2 request downgraders. In particular, same task repetition caused the learners to process pragmalinguistic-sociopragmatic connections at a deeper level than similar task repetition, as indicated by the better performance of the group under the condition of same task repetition in producing L2 request downgraders.

One pedagogical implication for teachers, then, is that they should be aware that effective learning is likely to occur with task repetition. It is advisable for a task to be repeated so that the connections among pragmalinguistic-sociopragmatic factors of target structures can be reinforced. Such tasks may prove to be of great value in improving learners’ L2 pragmatic proficiency.

Several limitations of the present study should be considered for the future study. One of the major limitations involves the selection of testing instruments. The testing instruments in the present study consisted of two different kinds of tests: a discourse completion test and an acceptability judgment test. As both tests were conducted without any time constraints, participants had sufficient time to complete the task and were likely to resort to their controlled processing. Accordingly, judgment and production methods of testing were used for evaluating participants’ controlled processing skills, but there were no tests for assessing their automatic processing skills. The addition of an on-line speaking test or listening test should have been added as an additional measure of automatic processing skills and would have provided more in-depth information about the effectiveness of same task repetition and similar task repetition in teaching English request downgraders. Second, the present study used the discourse completion test which is a non-interactive instrument and does not produce natural conversational data. The discourse completion test is limited as an instrument for examining the participants’ pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic knowledge for English request downgraders in that the data collected would find out only what the participants knew. A natural interactive instrument would have allowed us to see what the participants could do.

In spite of these shortcomings, the present study contributes to our understanding of task repetition. First, task repetition is effective in promoting gains in controlled processing skills for learning L2 pragmatics when accompanied by processing of the target feature through pragmalinguistic-sociopragmatic connections. Second, more effective learning occurs with same task repetition, which seems to reinforce L2 pragmatic learning and entrench pragmalinguistic-sociopragmatic knowledge about L2 pragmatics. Thus, one implication of the present study is that researchers and teachers might find it rewarding to devote more energy to designing effective task repetition to assist learners in processing both pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic factors in greater depth.
Notes
1. In behavioral research, researcher expectancy can be a problem when the researcher teaches and selects 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 began with pre-test, the test would affect performance during the treatment and on future tests. The test would alert participants as to what the researcher expected 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 were relatively uniform and consistent ($SD = .82 \sim 1.08$, range $= 2.00 \sim 4.00$). These data were used as the baseline data.

References


**Appendix**

**Sample Structure Input Tasks**

**Referential-oriented activity**

Read the following situation and the dialogue, choose the more appropriate request form out of the 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: Tanaka and Suzuki, two young men of about the same age, are neighbors, though they do not know each other well. They meet at the elevator.

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**Tanaka:** Hi, Mr. Suzuki. How are you?

**Suzuki:** Good, thank you. How are you?

**Tanaka:** I’m fine, thank you. I’m going out of town for a year and 1. (a) *I wonder if you could water my plants while I am away*; (b) *could you water my plants while I am away*?

**Suzuki:** Well, I guess I could do that. How often do they need to be watered?

**Tanaka:** Well, 2. (a) *I would appreciate it if you could water the flowers everyday and the other plants two or three times a week*; (b) *could you water the flowers everyday and the other plants two or three times a week*?

**Suzuki:** OK.
Affective-oriented activity

Read the following situation and the dialogue and answer the following questions.

Situation: Yoko is living in an apartment. Yoko is busy working on her assignment, but she needs to return 10 books to the library today. Her neighbor, Mary, whom she has never spoken to before, is extremely busy, but she decides to ask her neighbor to return the books. She goes over to her neighbor.

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Yoko: Hi.
Mary: Hi
Yoko: I’m Yoko. I live next door. What’s your name?
Mary: I’m Mary. Nice to meet you, Yoko.
Yoko: Are you off?
Mary: No. I am really busy doing household chores.
Yoko: Oh, 1. could you perhaps do me a favor later?
Mary: What is it?
Yoko: I need to return books to the library today. So, 2. I wonder if it would be possible for you to return them for me.
Mary: I guess I could that.

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Indicate the appropriateness level of the two underlined requests from your point of view on a scale as below:

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