EXPLICIT INSTRUCTION OF SITUATION-SPECIFIC FORMULAIC EXPRESSIONS AND SECOND LANGUAGE PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE

A classroom intervention study

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Abstract

Research in both formulaic language and interlanguage pragmatics has shown that situation-specific formulaic expressions may often serve pragmatic purposes (Bardovi-Harlig, 2012). The majority of the studies have focused on awareness-raising and attention-directing techniques in teaching formulaic language and pragmatics (Boers & Lindstromberg, 2012). However, few studies have investigated the efficacy of instructed formulaic language for enhancing second language pragmatic competence. This paper reports on a study which explored the role of explicit instruction of refusal and thanking formulaic expressions in developing L2 pragmatic competence. Eight students from two Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) programs were assigned to treatment and control groups and engaged in six role-plays focused on refusal and thanking situational scenarios during pre-, post- and delayed post-tests. In addition, the treatment group was exposed to a nine-hour explicit instruction course that consisted of tasks designed to augment acquisition of meanings and/or functions of refusal and thanking formulaic expressions. The results suggest that after the explicit instruction course the treatment group participants' oral performance on both post- and delayed post-tests became more contextually appropriate and accurate, while the control group participants' performance did not change considerably throughout the experiment. Furthermore, in their reflections on the impact the course had on their learning experiences, treatment group participants reported that they started to feel more confident about their L2 oral communication skills.

Several decades ago Pawley and Syder (1983) argued that few non-native speakers can fully acquire the native speaker repertoire of formulaic sequences, whereas native speakers possess what they called NATIVELIKE SELECTION of speech. According to Pawley and Syder (1983), nativelike selection is the ability of native speakers of English to use expressions that are not only grammatically accurate but also natural and idiomatic. To date, multiple studies have been devoted to defining and categorizing formulaic language as well as to addressing possible issues of acquisition of this complex phenomenon by second language (L2) learners. For example, Weinert (2010) concluded that the most recent studies tend to use the label FORMULAIC as an umbrella term to refer to various language phenomena, such as proverbs, collocations, lexical bundles, fixed sequences, and many others. According to Wray and Perkins (2000), formulaic language has a multi-faceted nature. Based on their widely-cited definition of a formulaic sequence, such expressions have a prefabricated nature and are stored and retrieved whole from memory at the time of use (Wray & Perkins, 2000). Bardovi-Harlig (2012), in her recent review on formulaic language in pragmatics research, argued that formulaic expressions often carry a strong sense of social contract, or, in other words, are highly situation-specific. The particular subset of situation-specific formulaic expressions (e.g., *nice to meet you; can I leave a message; how are you doing*), also known as SITUATION-BASED UTTERANCES (Bardovi-Harlig, 2012), is the focus of the study presented in this paper. The term FORMULA may also be used as a shortened form of SEMANTIC FORMULA which usually describes a component of certain speech acts (Bardovi-Harlig, 2012) (i.e., expressing surprise or delight, expressing affection or emphasizing the depth of gratitude). According to Cohen (2005), such semantic formulas tend to be used in a given speech act and add the pragmatic value to the utterance if used appropriately.

Pragmatics and Communicative Language Competence

With the rise of the communicative approach to language teaching (Savignon, 1976), it has been recognized that both pragmatic competence and grammatical accuracy are important components that constitute overall L2 communicative language ability. There emerged an understanding that learners need to know how to achieve their communicative goals through linguistic forms to ensure successful communication. The study of pragmatics is largely concerned with language use in various sociocultural contexts as well as with individual's linguistic choices that can have various effects on an interlocutor (Laughlin, Wain, & Schmidgall, 2015). Nattinger and De Carrico (1992) noted that researchers, especially those concerned with language pedagogy, were troubled because of the lack of descriptions of pragmatic knowledge with respect to competence and performance in the Chomskyan model of linguistic competence. This resulted in the development of the term COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE, which expanded the notion of linguistic competence and included the ability to understand meaning in context. Canale and Swain (1980) distinguished four components that create the construct of communicative competence. In this model, the first two components (grammatical and discourse competences) reflect the use of the linguistic system itself; the last two (sociolinguistic and strategic competences) define the functional aspects of communication. Another framework of communicative language ability, that

first introduced the term PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE, was proposed by Bachman and Palmer (1996) and based on findings from language testing research (Bachman & Palmer, 1982). In this model, language knowledge is divided into two main types: organizational and pragmatic. While organizational knowledge involves an understanding of how individual utterances or sentences are organized to form texts, PRAGMATIC KNOWLEDGE involves an understanding of how utterances are related to the communicative goals of the language user, and how they are related to features of the language use setting (Bachman & Palmer, 1996, p. 68). Taguchi (2016) noted that while "the early models conceptualized pragmatic competence as knowledge of form-function-context mappings, more recent models have emphasized interaction skills that enable learners to implement this knowledge in interaction" (p. 2). Drawing on the combination of both early and recent models of communicative competence (e.g., Celce-Murcia, 2007), Taguchi proposed a synthesized definition of pragmatic competence which was adopted for the purpose of the present study. According to Taguchi's (2016) definition, pragmatic competence is a socially co-constructed phenomenon and consists of three main components: knowledge of linguistic forms and their functional meanings; sociocultural knowledge; and the ability to use this knowledge to create a communicative act in interaction.

Formulaic Language and Pragmatics in L2 Teaching

Research on formulaic language and interlanguage pragmatics has shown that teaching these two linguistic aspects can be very advantageous for L2 learners. Boers, Eyckmans, Kappel, Stengers and Demecheleer (2006) found that students who were made aware of standardized word combinations in authentic reading and listening materials significantly improved their oral proficiency. Boers and Lindstromberg (2012) listed three main approaches to focused or explicit instruction of formulaic sequences in the L2 classroom. These include: (1) drawing learners' attention to formulaic sequences as they are encountered; (2) stimulating the use of dictionaries and corpus tools; (3) helping learners memorize particular formulaic sequences (p. 83). A study by Wood (2009) explored the effects of focused instruction of formulaic sequences on L2 learners' fluent expression while producing spontaneous narratives; it was concluded that the development of a wide repertoire of formulaic sequences had a direct impact on improving L2 speech fluency. Another reason why formulaic expressions should be explicitly taught to L2 learners is the fact that the majority of such word strings are not easily translated into learners' L1s. Despite the fact that developing pragmatic competence is a time-consuming process, it is possible to enhance learners' pragmatic competence through pedagogical interventions (Bardovi-Harlig & Griffin, 2005). Cohen (2005) argued that introducing L2 learners to various strategies of learning and performing speech acts may be a key to the successful development of L2 pragmatic ability. Likewise, evidence from L2 pragmatics research indicates that there is an urgent need for teaching pragmatics in L2 classrooms since target language pragmatic structures are not always salient to L2 learners. Research has shown that it might be equally challenging to become PRAGMATICALLY FLUENT at both beginner and advanced levels of proficiency (House, 1996). Furthermore, previous research has suggested

that pragmatic failures may lead to cross-cultural misunderstandings caused by improper usage of formulaic expressions in certain speech contexts (Decapua & Dunham, 2007).

Despite the strong relationship between mastering formulaic expressions and developing L2 pragmatic competence, the potential of teaching formulaic language for developing L2 pragmatic competence has been overlooked in previous research. Few studies have investigated the effectiveness of instructed formulaic language and pragmatics not only for awareness-raising purposes, but also for the sake of stimulating retention of formulaic sequences that possess pragmatic functions in students' active lexicon (Webb & Kagimoto, 2011). The majority of studies have been mainly devoted to the instructional effects of L2 pragmatics on learners' noticing and recognition ability and on raising meta-pragmatic awareness (Bardovi-Harlig & Griffin, 2005; Cruz, 2013). Having considered this research gap, the objective of the present study was twofold. First, it investigated whether and how the explicit instruction of situation-specific formulaic expressions (i.e., refusal and thanking) could develop L2 pragmatic competence and foster both acquisition and retention of such expressions; second, it explored whether and in how the explicit instruction can help L2 learners overcome challenges they might face during spontaneous communication in L2. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. Can the explicit instruction of refusal and thanking formulaic expressions and semantic formulas:

   a. foster their acquisition and retention by second language (L2) learners;

   b. develop L2 pragmatic competence?

2. What are the challenges L2 learners may face while performing refusal and thanking speech acts?

3. Does the explicit instruction help L2 learners to overcome those challenges? If yes, in what ways?

Method

Overview and Participants

The present study took a form of a quasi-experimental collective case-study (Dorneyi, 2007) with elements of instructional intervention. The data was collected during several stages over a period of four months. Overall, eight students took part in this study and were assigned to treatment and control groups.

Treatment group

The treatment group included four participants (two males and two females) at an intermediate level of spoken English proficiency. The participants spoke different L1s (Arabic, French and Mandarin Chinese) and came from different cultural and educational backgrounds. At the time of the study, they were enrolled in one of Ottawa's Language

Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) programs (level 5). I refer to the four students by their assigned pseudonyms: Mustafa, Julia, Marcus, and Amandine. **Mustafa** (L1 Arabic) was a 27-year-old male from Lebanon, where he had received an associate's degree in nursing. **Julia** (L1 Mandarin Chinese) was a 35-year-old female from China, where she had received a college diploma in international trade. **Marcus** (L1 French) was a 33-year-old male from Cameroon. He had received his master's degree in management in France, where he had worked for a big company for the past several years before moving to Canada. **Amandine** (L1 French) was a 28-year-old female from Ivory Coast, where she had obtained her master's degree in marketing.

Control group

The control group also comprised four intermediate (LINC-5) participants (one male and three females) who came from different cultural and L1 backgrounds. I refer to the four students by their assigned pseudonyms: Anand, Tisha, Brianna, and Kim. The participants spoke French (Tisha), Korean (Kim), Bhutanese (Anand), and Burmese (Brianna) languages as their L1s. At the time of the study, the participants attended classes at a different Ottawa LINC (level 5) school. Since the control group participants did not receive any treatment, and their performance on the tests served only as a comparison factor, no further demographic information was collected.

Procedures of Data Collection and Analysis

Creating the native speaker corpus

Twenty native speakers completed six multiple-turn written discourse completion tasks (WDCTs; Ishihara & Cohen, 2014) based on the following scenarios: refusing friend's invitation, rejecting sales offer, refusing manager's request, responding to compliment, thanking colleague for a favour, and thanking your manager. Their responses to these tasks comprised the *Native Speaker (NS) Corpus*. Recognizing that the written responses threaten authenticity of the collected data, and that the NS baseline would ideally be speech data rather than written one, it was nevertheless decided to collect native-like responses using the WDCTs for two main reasons. First, due to the limited time allocated to this research project, it was more feasible to collect the NS responses by means of the WDCTs; second, this data collection method seemed appropriate for collecting language data that would be relevant for the specific tasks that were later used during the pedagogical intervention. The topics for the WDCTs were selected from *LINC 5–7 Curriculum Guidelines* (Hajer, Kaskens, & Stasiak, 2007). According to this document, LINC curriculum has to provide newcomers with language instruction that will facilitates their social, cultural and economic integration into Canada. It contains topics and lesson strategies that are consistent with the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) (Pawlikowska-Smith, 2000). An example of one WDCT is included in Appendix 1.

Administration of the pre-, post- and delayed post-tests

Refusal and thanking formulaic expressions as well as speech-act semantic formulas were elicited from both treatment and control group participants at three points in time: prior to the instructional intervention (pre-test); immediately after the explicit instruction course (post-test); and approximately one month after the post-test (delayed post-test). During the pre-test, the participants were given the same scenarios as the ones given to the native speakers, this time in a form of six multiple-turn oral discourse completion role-plays (DCRPs; Ishihara & Cohen, 2014). During the post- and delayed post-tests, the scenarios of the DCRPs were slightly changed to ensure participants' exposure to different conversational contexts. All DCRPs were audio-recorded, transcribed and coded for refusal and thanking formulaic expressions and semantic formulas based on the pre-determined criteria. The total number of types and tokens of refusal and thanking formulaic expressions produced by the participants during each test was calculated. The TOKEN counts (the number of unique formulaic expressions that were used) served to show whether the quantity of formulaic expressions used by the treatment group participants increased in the post- and delayed post-tests; the TYPES (how many out of one type of formulaic expressions were used) determined whether the RANGE (variety) of formulaic expressions they produced during DCRPs increased after the treatment. Additionally, the researcher together with two independent native English speaker collaborators reviewed the treatment group participants' performance during each test to avoid researcher bias in favour of the treatment group participants and to ensure consistency in judgement.

Defining and Identifying Refusal and Thanking Formulaic Expressions

The following criteria were applied to identify refusal and thanking formulaic expressions in the NS corpus:

- recurrent formulaic expressions used for specific pragmatic purposes (e.g., *I won't be able to make it; thanks so much for + doing something*; Bardovi-Harlig, 2012);
- greater length or complexity (e.g., *let me know if I can ever do anything for you*; example taken from the NS corpus);
- semantic irregularity close to idioms or metaphors (e.g., *that's a real vote of confidence*; Wray & Perkins, 2000);
- formulaic expressions that were part of a speech act but did not explicitly perform refusal or thanking functions (e.g., *prior commitment, not a good time*; example taken from the NS corpus);
- a combination of the above mentioned criteria and researcher's own judgement.

Overall, 40 refusal and 34 thanking formulaic expressions were elicited from the NS corpus; they were further used to design teaching materials for the pedagogical intervention stage (see Appendix 2 for the full list of the elicited formulaic expressions).

Defining and identifying refusal and thanking semantic formulas

Semantic formulas in the refusal speech acts were elicited based on the criteria outlined in Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss-Weltz (1990). These were: statement of negative ability (e.g., *I can't*); statement of regret (e.g., *I'm sorry*); wish (e.g., *I wish I could help you*); excuse, reason, explanation (e.g., *I have to go to the hospital*); promise of future acceptance (e.g., *I'll do it next time*); and statement of principle (e.g., *I never do business with friends*). Semantic formulas in the thanking speech acts were elicited using a combination of taxonomies offered by Eisenstein and Bodman (1986; e.g., thanking + reassuring the listener; thanking + expressing surprise and delight; thanking + exaggerating to emphasize the depth of the gratitude) as well as by Schauer and Adolphs (2006; e.g., thanking + stating intent to reciprocate: to do or give something, because something similar was done or given to you). Later in the analysis, elicited utterances in both refusal and thanking speech acts (from both native speakers and L2 participants) were divided into components, and each component was assigned a corresponding semantic formula following the above mentioned taxonomy. Overall, 13 refusal and eight thanking semantic formulas and their verbal equivalents were identified in the NS corpus. Some examples of the refusal semantic formulas along with their verbal equivalents include:

- statement of regret + statement of negative ability + promise of future acceptance (i.e., *I'm sorry, I won't be able to make it. Hopefully, we can get together soon*);
- gratitude + explanation + excuse (i.e., *Thank you but I'm quite happy with my current phone plan. I'm afraid I'm not interested*).
- Examples of thanking semantic formulas and their verbal equivalents include:
- thanking + expressing surprise and delight + confirming commitment (i.e., *Woah! I am so surprised, thank you very much! So thoughtful of you! I will not disappoint you!*);
- thanking + promising to do or give something because something similar was done or given to you (i.e., *Thanks a lot for filling in for me today. I really owe you one*).

Explicit instruction course

Participants from the treatment group were exposed to a nine-hour explicit instruction course that followed immediately after the administration of the pre-test. The course was delivered in three-week period and consisted of six sessions (two sessions per week). Learners were encouraged to complete various activities designed by the researcher in order to stimulate acquisition and retention of refusal and thanking formulaic expressions. These activities were based on several fundamental approaches reviewed in Boers and Lindstromberg (2012). At the same time, the researcher drew on strategies for the initial learning of speech acts (Cohen, 2005) to design activities aimed at teaching semantic formulas of the refusal and thanking speech acts (see Appendix 3). In summary, during the course the participants received a significant amount of metapragmatic information (Taguchi, 2015); they also participated in various whole class discussions devoted to the

nature of refusal and thanking formulaic expressions, their meanings and pragmatic functions. Figure 1 below provides a schematic overview of the main pedagogical approaches used in the explicit instruction course (see Appendix 4 for an example of a lesson plan):

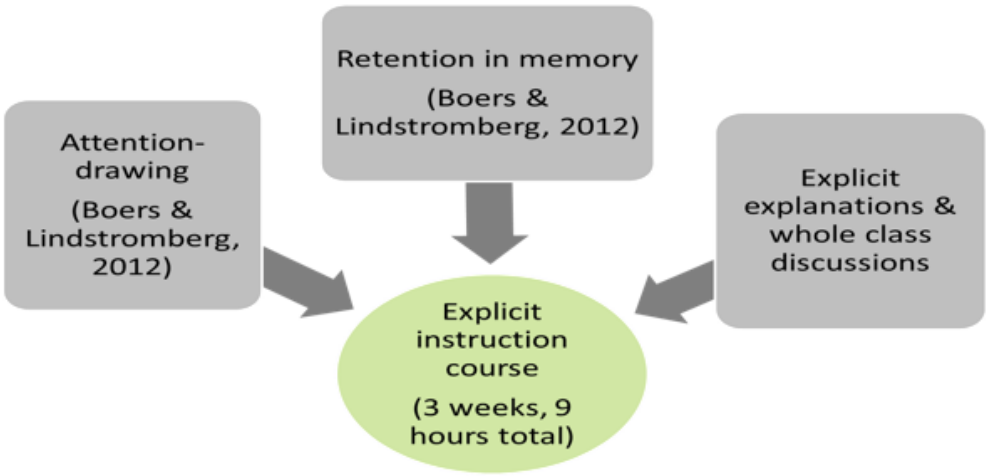

Figure 1. Teaching techniques used during the explicit instruction course.

Students' oral reflections

To better understand the role of instructed formulaic language in the development of L2 pragmatic competence, the treatment group participants were asked to reflect on their learning experiences during the explicit instruction course. They answered the following questions:

1. What challenges, if any, have you experienced while performing refusal and thanking speech acts?
2. Was the explicit instruction course useful for you? If yes, could you explain why? Has it helped you to overcome the challenges?

It is worth noting that the participants answered these questions in English which not only directed their attention to the target refusal and thanking formulaic expressions but also provided them with additional opportunities to practice these expressions in a meaningful context.

Findings and Discussion

Acquisition and Retention of Refusal and Thanking Formulaic Expressions

Treatment group

The results revealed considerable improvement in the performance of the treatment group participants after the nine-hour pedagogical intervention. While the post-test showed

that these L2 learners had acquired a sufficient number of refusal and thanking formulaic expressions taught during the course, the delayed post-test showed that they were able to retain the majority of them one month after the course completion. It is possible to perceive the change in participants' performance by looking at the two examples provided below.

The two most commonly occurring refusal and thanking formulaic expressions which **Mustafa** (L1 Arabic) used in the pre-test (Table 1) were *I'm sorry* or *Thank you*. On the contrary, the data collected during the post- and the delayed post-tests revealed a greater variety and complexity of formulaic expressions. The utterances he produced after the explicit instruction contain more complex and native-like formulaic expressions, such as *I am afraid to tell you* or *I am glad you called*. Moreover, Mustafa also used formulaic expressions that frequently occurred in the NS corpus, but did not directly perform the refusal or thanking pragmatic functions. Examples include phrases like *I am really satisfied with*, or *I really appreciate it*.

Table 1

Examples of formulaic expressions used by Mustafa's pre-, post- and delayed post-tests

SCENARIO	PRE-TEST	POST-TEST	DELAYED POST-TEST	SPEECH ACT
Rejecting sales offer	*thank you* *I'm sorry*	*I am afraid to tell you* *I am really satisfied with current plan* *thank you for the offer*	*sounds good* *I am not interested*	Refusal
Thanking manager for promotion/ raising salary/ day off	*thank you* *thank you*	*I am really very happy* *I am very surprised* *thank you very much* *I will be waiting for it*	*I want to thank you for* *I really appreciate it* *I am really thankful*	Thanking

Note. All formulaic expressions were considered, including the repeated ones.

Julia's (L1 Mandarin Chinese) responses to the refusal scenarios in the pre-test included incomplete formulaic expressions like *very sorry*. In the thanking speech acts, Julia mostly used cliché formulaic expressions like *Thank you* or *Thank you very much*. In addition, some of her pre-test responses contained grammar errors and non-standard word order (e.g., *Thank you for have me*). Unlike her pre-test responses, Julia's post-test and delayed post-test utterances contained examples of formulaic expressions like *I'd like to, but*; *Thank you for your invitation* or *Thank you for understanding*. Such expressions made Julia's responses sound more confident. In addition, she managed to express her gratitude in a native-like like manner (e.g., *Wow, I am so surprised*; *That's so thoughtful of you*).

Table 2

Examples of formulaic expressions used by Julia's pre-, post- and delayed post-tests

SCENARIO	PRE-TEST	POST-TEST	DELAYED POST-TEST	SPEECH ACT
Refusing friend's invitation	very sorry very-very sorry	I'd like to, but I have appointment thank you for your invitation enjoy your time see you next time	thank you for inviting but I won't be able to make it *I am sorry* *thank you for understanding*	Refusal
Thanking manager for promotion/ raising salary/ day off	*oh really* *thank you very much* *thank you for have me* *thank you* *I will try my best to work hard*	*oh, really?* *wow, I am so surprised* *it's thoughtful of you* *thank you* *I'll do my best* *thank you*	*thank you for giving a day off* *I made a prior commitment* *let me know if I can do anything anytime in future* *thank you for understanding*	Thanking

Note. All formulaic expressions were considered, including the repeated ones.

Figure 2 illustrates the overall results of the treatment group performance and includes the total number of types of refusal and thanking formulaic expressions used in all three tests.

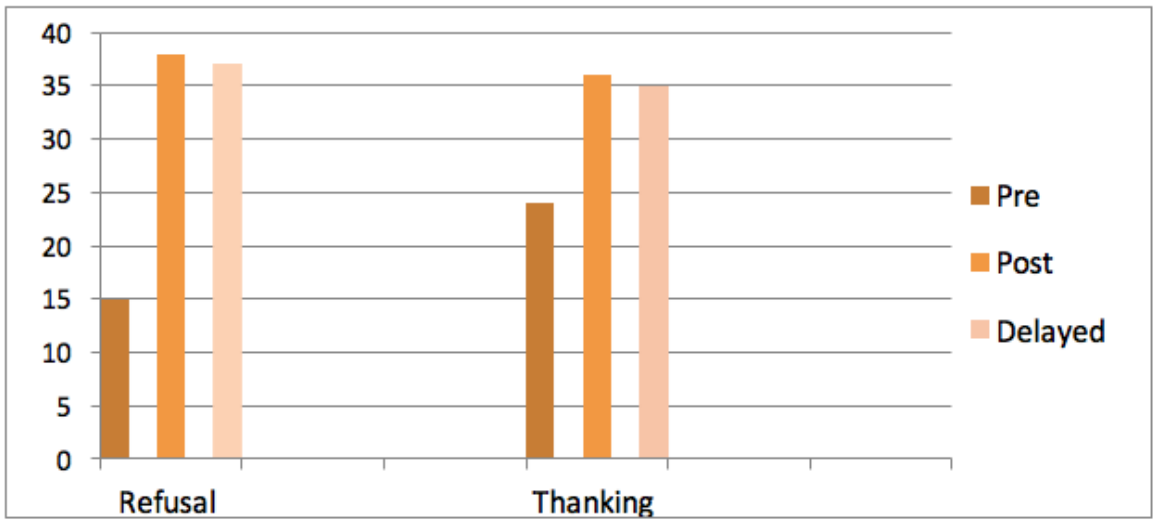

Figure 2. Total number of types of formulaic expressions used in three tests: Treatment group.

Previous research demonstrated that explicit instruction can facilitate development of L2 pragmatic competence. Developing learners' L2 pragmatic competence can help them become more grammatically accurate (Felix-Brasdefer & Cohen, 2012). The treatment group participants in this study used more grammatically accurate phrases in the post- and delayed post-tests. Interestingly, almost all those phrases contained refusal or thanking formulaic expressions from the NS corpus. These formulaic expressions helped learners to process chunks of grammatically accurate language and help them sound more proficient without necessarily having full control over the language grammar. Explicit teaching of L2 pragmatics helped leaners to notice the differences between their L1 and L2 and better understand the sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic choices that native speakers make in various speech acts (Ghobadi & Fahim, 2009).

Control group

The control group participants, on the contrary, did not acquire a large number of the target refusal and thanking formulaic expressions during the period of the study. Despite the fact that the control group participants were receiving language instruction in LINC during the entire period of the study, their responses in all three tests were very inconsistent and contextually inappropriate in terms of the formulaic expressions they used in the DCRPs. Moreover, in some cases the number of both tokens and types of formulaic expressions decreased in the post-test (see Figure 3).

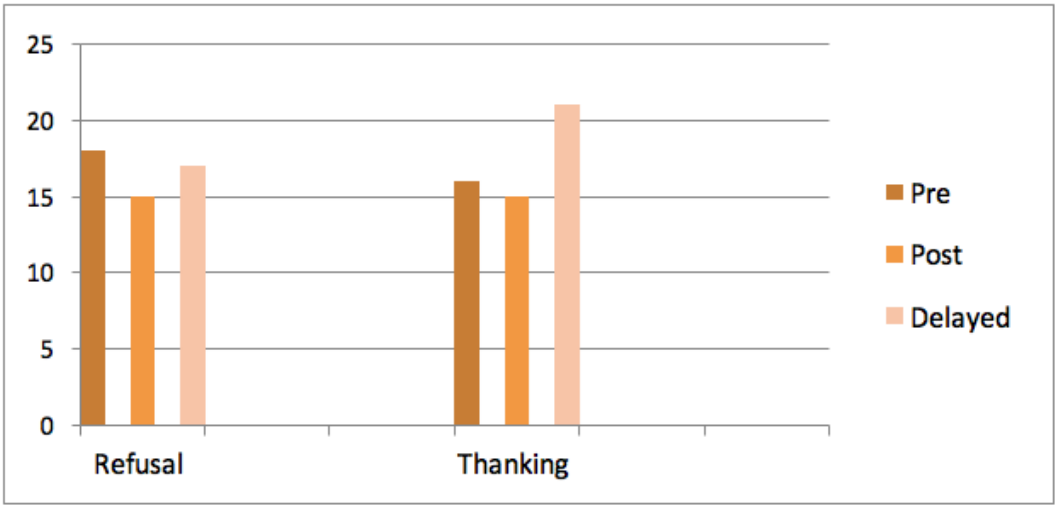

Figure 3. Total number of types of formulaic expressions used in 3 tests: Control group.

L2 Pragmatic Competence Development

Treatment group

The analysis of the structure of the semantic formulas produced by the treatment group participants in all three tests has shown an increase in the quality of the semantic formulas produced after the intervention. Bardovi-Harlig (2009) argued that the recognition of

situation-specific formulaic expressions is a necessary condition for production, but is not sufficient for further successful retention and performance. Among the reasons for learners' low use of such expressions she mentioned lack of familiarity with some expressions and overuse of familiar expressions, which reduces the opportunity to use more target-like expressions. In addition to attention-drawing techniques used in the course of this study, the treatment group participants were also encouraged to complete several activities which focused on retention of formulaic expressions as well as semantic formulas of the target language. This could explain their improved performance in both post- and delayed post-tests.

Mustafa. During the pre-test, Mustafa produced phrases like *I just want to tell you that I will decline your invitation* or *I will not take it because I take this plan with Virgin mobile from three weeks ago* in order to express the *statement of negative ability*. However, the utterances produced by Mustafa after the explicit instruction course, were clearly more concise, native-like and pragmatically appropriate. For instance, the semantic formula of future acceptance was incomplete in the pre-test: *I wish, but I*. This may suggest that he did not know the proper formulaic expression that could fit that context. On the other hand, in the post-test as well as in the delayed post-test, Mustafa was able to attend to the same speech act of thanking in a more pragmatically effective way, despite the grammatical discrepancy: *I wish we will see each other later*.

Julia. Julia experienced a lot of difficulties while trying to formulate the structure of semantic formulas during the pre-test. Her responses were often interrupted with pauses and sounded quite abrupt and incomplete (e.g. *Oh, I see… But my cell phone, the… the… I don't know how to say, now the… the… is okay I think)*. Julia expressed one semantic formula (thanking + promising to do or give something because something similar was done or given to you) in a very uncommon—for the English language—way by offering her pretended manager (the researcher) a drink after work (*have a drink, please, after work?)*. In her post-test responses, however, she expressed the same semantic formula in a much more contextually appropriate way: *Thank you! If you need help, please, tell me!*

Marcus. Whereas in the pre-test Marcus gave a very long and unnecessary explanation (*I understand that your plan is very interesting* [pause], *so I very understand, but I can't change my plan because Rogers give me a good plan*), in the post- and delayed post-test he managed to use the formulaic expressions *I am satisfied with my current plan* and *I am not interested* which made his response more structured, concise and pragmatically appropriate. In the pre-test, Marcus tended to use very unnatural English language phrases like *I cannot disappoint you*. On the contrary, in the post- and delayed post-test he expressed a similar idea in a more native-like way: *You will not be disappointed*.

Amandine. Amandine's semantic formulas in the post- and delayed post-tests became better structured and clearer. She successfully used appropriate refusal and thanking formulaic expressions in such semantic formulas like expressing commitment (*I am able*

to work hard. I will wait for this) and promising to do or give something similar because something similar was done or given to her (*let me know if you have anything to do next time*).

Control group

In comparison to the treatment group participants, the control group students did not develop their L2 pragmatic competence well enough in order to produce refusal or thanking formulaic expressions appropriately in a given context. In other words, due to the limited range of refusal and thanking formulaic expressions used by control group participants, their responses lacked a native-like way of expression. In addition, the results of all three tests show that the semantic structure of the responses to both speech acts produced by the control group lacked coherence and logic and most of the time were incomplete or abrupt. The following examples show that the L2 respondents produced incomplete refusal or thanking statements and were not able to successfully reach the communicative goals:

- *My son is sick…and now I am… I stay, or…* (Brianna, refusal);
- *Oh thank you for doing my work, it's really…* (Anand, thanking);
- *Thank you. Yes, I am really…* (Kim, thanking).

Moreover, the responses of the control group participants contain multiple examples of pragmatically inappropriate utterances or utterances with various semantic irregularities. These include: *Thank you so much, God bless you!* (Brianna, thanking manager); *I will remind this help* (Tisha, thanking colleague); *If I finish early I come for my office so I work very hard* (Kim, confirming her commitment and thanking manager).

Challenges of the L2 Learners and the Benefits of the Explicit Instruction

The oral reflections collected from the treatment group participants immediately after the post- and delayed post-tests revealed multiple challenges they faced while performing refusal and thanking speech acts.

Q1: What challenges, if any, have you experienced while performing refusal and thanking speech acts? Among the challenges the participants identified the following major ones: inability to perceive formulaic expressions as holistic units; tendency to translate words one by one from L1; inability to speak spontaneously and fluently; tendency to misuse structures of English semantic formulas.

Inability to perceive formulaic expressions as holistic units. Almost all participants noted that before the explicit instruction sessions they were unable to perceive formulaic expressions as prefabricated or holistic units (Wray & Perkins, 2000). This is what Amandine said in her reflection:

> I was trying to separate… to check the meaning one by one…But then you said: "No, it's bundle, you don't have to separate them." Now I know that the

> bundles [formulaic expressions] cannot be separated. I didn't realize that the bundle word you have to put them together. If you say "I can't afford that" it makes you understand that you can't separate them.

Ellis, Simpson-Vlach and Maynard (2008) examined three corpus-derived metrics that affected accuracy and fluency of processing formulaic sequences: length, frequency, and mutual information. They found that for the native speakers it was predominantly the mutual information (association between the words) of the formula that determined processability, whereas for the non-native speakers the frequency of occurrence played the most important role. The results of the present study showed that all four participants were unable to perceive previously unknown formulaic expressions as wholes until their meanings and pragmatic functions were explicitly explained during the course.

Tendency to translate words one by one from L1

Negative transfer in pragmatics was previously discussed in Olshtain (1983), Kasper (1992), and Takahashi (1996). These studies discussed the effect of social-effective factors on the use and acquisition of L2 pragmatic competence. Almost every participant of the treatment group had a tendency to translate words one by one from the L1 when trying to produce an utterance. For instance, Marcus said:

In the beginning I always wanted to translate from my L1, but now I speak more fluent[ly].

Q2: Was the explicit instruction course useful for you? If yes, could you explain why? Has it helped you to overcome the challenges? In terms of how the students commented on the role of the explicit instruction of formulaic language (refusal and thanking formulaic expressions) and pragmatics (semantic formulas), the answers contained the following major themes: increase of confidence; increase in fluency; vocabulary enrichment; time-efficient way of learning English.

Increase of confidence

Almost every participant mentioned an increase in confidence in his or her speech after the explicit instruction. After the delayed post-test was administered Mustafa noted:

When I speak to my English-speaking friends or neighbours, I feel better and much confident.

Julia also mentioned that she was able to use her newly acquired knowledge for every-day communication, and that she felt more confident:

It's very useful, I think. Because every day I go outside to communicate with other persons and I use these words to talk to him. So every day I use it, it's very useful. Now I have the formulas [formulaic expressions] and strategies [semantic formulas], so I can feel more confident.

Vocabulary enrichment

The participants also noted that their English vocabulary expanded after the explicit instruction course. For example, Amandine said:

I think that was very helpful because I learnt new words, I learnt how I can ask for something or I can ask for help. I can also reply when someone complimented me about something.

Time-efficient way of learning English

Another important finding, that arose from the reflections, is that focused instruction of situation-specific formulaic expressions can not only improve learners' pragmatic competence, but can also serve as one of the ways to avoid tedious explanations of complex grammatical structures and memorization of long lists of vocabulary items. To become active members of their communities and find employment, LINC students need to adjust to their new country as soon as possible. As Marcus emphasized in his reflection, "we are here because we want to work. We are not here because we want to continue to go to school".

Conclusion and Implications for Language Teaching

This small-scale qualitative study suggests that teaching situation-specific formulaic expressions and semantic formulas of various speech acts may bring for L2 teaching and learning. The results show that L2 learners benefit from a combination of explicit instruction techniques (e.g., attention-drawing, explicit explanations and whole class discussions) in terms of acquisition and retention of situation-specific formulaic expressions and, by this means, develop their L2 pragmatic competence. The study has also demonstrated that, while teaching formulaic language helps with developing fluency, explicit instruction of L2 pragmatics may lead L2 learners to produce more concise and contextually appropriate utterances. To this end, more activities focusing on formulaic language and pragmatics should be incorporated into day-to-day classroom practices, especially if the final objective of the course is to enhance oral proficiency. Language teachers might also consider initiating whole-class discussions about the meanings and pragmatic functions of various formulaic expressions that commonly occur in English speech acts. In this study, such discussions were an integral part of each session and proved to be very effective in fostering learners' acquisition and retention of formulaic expressions and semantic formulas. In addition, role-plays are effective techniques for stimulating meaningful interaction and negotiation of meaning in the L2 classroom, and, therefore, should not be neglected by teachers. Moreover, by encouraging students to reflect on their language learning, teachers can deepen students' understanding of the target language structures; such reflections can also be used as part of the ongoing (formative) assessment of students' achievement. Since the present study's results cannot be generalised beyond the four participants of the treatment group, large-scale empirical research needs to be conducted to explore the potential of explicit instruction of formulaic expressions that occur in other speech acts. Findings from such studies can largely contribute to the development and improvement of LINC curriculum as well as provide a basis for teacher professional development programs.

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Appendix 1: An example of a Written Discourse Completion Task (WDCT)

Refusing manager's request (refusal)

Scenario: Your manager is asking you to stay for several extra hours after work today. However, you have an appointment scheduled with your family doctor that you have been waiting for more than a month. How would you explain the reason of your inability to stay in a polite way? In the dialogue below please fill in the blanks and write your possible replies (what would you say in this situation). Make sure you have read the whole dialogue before you fill in the blanks.

Manager: Hi … (name)! Will you be able to stay for some extra time today after work? We really need to finish that report.

You: _____

Manager: Oh, that's a pity. Do you think you can still reschedule your appointment? I would really appreciate it if you could stay with us today.

You: _____

Manager: Okay, I see. I understand you have to take care of your health first. I will e-mail you the details of our meeting later today then.

Appendix 2: Refusal and Thanking Formulaic Expressions in the Native Speaker (NS) Corpus

Refusal formulaic expressions in the Native Speaker (NS) corpus

IDENTIFICATION CRITERIA	REFUSAL FORMULAS USED
Recurrent formulaic expressions used for pragmatic purpose of refusal	1. Sorry, I am not interested 2. It's not a good time to talk 3. Sorry, I can't make it 4. I won't be able to make it 5. Sorry, I can't afford that 6. Unfortunately I can't make it

Greater length or complexity	1. I wish I could have made it 2. I'm afraid I won't be able to make it this time 3. Unfortunately I can't, but I'd be willing to stay longer another day 4. I promise I will make it next time 5. I'm not in a position to afford this 6. I am not currently in a position to deal with this 7. It will have to be quick 8. I am really sorry to inconvenience you 9. I appreciate your understanding 10. Hopefully, we can get together soon/ another time
Formulaic expressions that were part of a speech act but did not explicitly perform refusal function	1. I already have a ___ I am satisfied with 2. I am glad you called 3. Go ahead 4. Prior commitment 5. I will stick with 6. I am satisfied with 7. Look forward to 8. Be willing to 9. Sounds like a good plan 10. Current plan 11. Have fun 12. Have a great time 13. Say hi to everyone 14. I'll miss you all as well 15. Thank you for understanding 16. Thank you for the offer 17. Sorry about that 18. Let me know 19. It will have to be quick 20. Perfect, thanks 21. Thanks so much 22. Thanks anyway 23. Thank you and sorry again 24. Thank you so much/very much

Thanking formulaic expressions in the Native Speaker (NS) corpus

IDENTIFICATION CRITERIA	THANKING FORMULAS USED
Recurrent formulaic expressions used for pragmatic purpose of thanking	1. Thanks so much for + doing something 2. Thank you for + doing something 3. Thank you, that's so sweet of you 4. Thank you for your confidence 5. Thank you, that's so thoughtful of you 6. Thank you! Do you really like it? 7. Thank you! Do you think it suits me? 8. Thanks, I love it 9. Thanks again
Greater length or complexity	1. Let me know if I can ever do anything for you 2. If you need anything, just let me know 3. Let me know if I can repay the favor sometime 4. I am glad you liked it
Semantic irregularity close to idioms or metaphors	1. I really owe you one 2. I'll do my best 3. How much of a relief it is 4. I can't thank you enough 5. You can count on me 6. It meant a lot to me 7. Thank you for putting your confidence in me 8. That's a real vote of confidence 9. That's wonderful news 10. You're the greatest 11. It's what friends are for 12. I was in a tight spot 13. I was in a bind

Formulaic expressions that were part of a speech act but did not explicitly perform thanking function	1. I really appreciate it 2. I'm honoured 3. I am so surprised 4. This is amazing 5. This is awesome 6. I am very excited to hear this 7. That's wonderful news 8. I will work hard

Appendix 3: Examples of an Activities Used in the Course

Activity 1: Focus on refusal formulaic expressions

FORMULAIC EXPRESSION	MEANING/FUNCTION
1. To make a prior commitment	a. To wait for something impatiently
2. Look forward to	b. a commitment that you have to finish before you start the next one someone is asking you to do
3. Get together	c. I really like this idea
4. Be willing to	d. To go to a small informal meeting or social gathering
5. Sounds like a good plan	e. I can't talk right now because I am busy
6. Can't make it	f. I don't want to accept it/have it
7. Can't afford that	g. I am not able to do it
8. Not a good time to talk	h. To gladly agree to do something
9. Not interested	i. Won't be able to do it
10. Won't be able to make it	j. I don't have money/time to buy/do something

Note. Answer key: 1. B; 2. A; 3. D; 4. H; 5. C; 6. G; 7. J; 8. E; 9. F; 10. I.

Activity 2: Focus on semantic formulas in thanking

EXAMPLE OF RESPONSE	SEMANTIC FORMULA
1. Thank you! Do you really like it?	a. Thanking+ reassuring the listener
2. Thanks a lot for filling in for me today. I really owe you one.	b. Thanking+ expressing affection
3. Thank you so much! I am really grateful. I know I'm ready for the job!	c. Thanking+ expressing surprise and delight
4. Wow, thank you. I appreciate you giving me this opportunity.	d. Thanking+ promising to do or give something because something similar was done or given to you
5. Thank you, that's so sweet of you!	e. Thanking+ expressing surprise and delight+ confirming commitment
6. Woah! I am so surprised, thank you very much! So thoughtful on you! I will not disappoint you!	f. Thanking+ emphasizing the depth of gratitude

Note. The terminology of semantic formulas is based on Eisenstein and Bodman (1986) and Schauer and Adolphs (2006). Answer key: 1. C; 2 D; 3. A; 4. F; 5. B; 6. E.

Appendix 4: An Example of a Lesson Plan

Focus on THANKING

Time: 9:00- 10:30 am

Number of students: 4

Objective: To draw learner's attention to the common English formulaic expressions and semantic formulas which occur in thanking speech acts; give learners an opportunity to discuss the differences between their L1s and English in terms of the usage of such expressions and semantic formulas.

Proficiency level: LINC- 5

1. Explicit instruction and awareness-raising (1 hour)
    - Students are given examples of ***thanking formulaic expressions*** from the NS corpus. Each student is given 15 formulaic responses, 5 from each scenario, in random order.
    - Students are given some time to review the responses and then asked to assign the type of ***semantic formula*** used in each response to its verbal equivalent. They choose from the following types:

        Thanking+ complementing

Thanking + expressing affection

Thanking + reassuring the listener

Thanking + promising to repay

Thanking+ expressing surprise and delight

Thanking+ exaggerating to emphasize the depth of the gratitude

Thanking+ confirming interlocutor's commitment

Thanking + stating intent to reciprocate (to do or give something, because something similar was done or given to you)

- The meaning of semantic formula is explicitly explained by the researcher before students start completing the task to make sure every learner understands the task.

2. Discussion and reflections (30 min)

- The objective of the discussion session is to check how many semantic formulas were properly identified by the learners as well as to direct students' attention to the thanking formulaic expressions that those responses contain.
- Students are asked to write a short reflection and answer the following question (30 min):

Which thanking formulaic expressions and semantic formulas from those that you have just reviewed would you use when:

- complimenting your friend;
- thanking your co-worker for taking your shift;
- thanking your manager for promotion?
- Students discuss the following questions with other group members: Have you noticed any differences between NS' *thanking strategies (semantic formulas)* and those used in your L1?
- Have you noticed any differences between *thanking formulaic expressions (fixed phrases)* used in English (NS corpus) and those you use in your L1 when thanking somebody for something?