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Explicit and Implicit Instruction of Apology and Request: Effects on Young Persian Heritage Learners' Pragmatic Competence

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Abstract

In spite of the increasing attention paid to heritage language education, the pragmatic development of young heritage learners has not gained much momentum. In an attempt to address this gap and following the research trends of interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) and heritage language education, this study aimed to unpack apology and request speech act production of young Persian heritage learners (HLs). The participants of the study were 85 lower-intermediate Iranian students (41 boys and 44 girls in grades 3 and 4) who were learning Persian as their heritage language in international schools. A researcher-made and validated Oral Discourse Completion Test (ODCT), including ten situations (five situations for each speech act), was used as the pre- and post-test to look into the influence of explicit and implicit instructions on the participants' pragmatic production. The participants were randomly assigned to two groups and were taught for six thirty-minute sessions. The explicit group was offered direct and metapragmatic instruction, while the implicit group received activities, such as role-plays and storytelling, the purpose of which was to indirectly pick up the pragmalinguistic forms and sociopragmatic norms. The findings demonstrated that the learners' speech act production is significantly influenced by both explicit and implicit teaching. Besides, the results indicated that implicit mode could be equally functional in specific contexts, calling for a reconceptualization of instructional strategies in speech act development, which encourages curriculum and materials developers to move beyond traditional reliance on explicit instruction and adopt a more comprehensive approach that prioritizes both explicit and implicit learning.

Keywords: explicit and implicit teaching, heritage language**,** heritage learners, pragmatic competence, speech acts

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INTRODUCTION

The field of teaching Persian to speakers of other languages has been one of the main areas of inquiry for linguists and language teaching researchers in the past decades in Iran. This area has been studied from different perspectives and offered as an official MA program for almost thirty years in a few Iranian universities. The gradual development of the field created an opportunity for many interested researchers, practitioners, and university students to conduct studies on multiple dimensions and domains of teaching Persian to speakers of other languages. Among the various dimensions and sub-areas, the domain of teaching Persian as a heritage language, particularly to young heritage learners, has become an emerging area in the past few years (Gharibi & Seals, 2020; Megerdoomian, 2020; Moeini Meybodi, 2025). This is mostly because of the increasing number of immigrant parents who desire to maintain and develop their native language by their children.

In contrast to the dominant language, the term "heritage language" is employed by various academicians to represent the native language of a minority population (He, 2006, 2014; Kaveh, 2018; Oriyama, 2011). Valdés (2000, p. 1) primarily characterized heritage language as "a language that is acquired at home but not in the broader society." García (2009, p. 143) defined heritage language as "a language that is acquired in the home but not in the broader society, and that is often not fully acquired due to limited exposure or negative attitudes", commonly culminating in inconsistent linguistic and pragmatic competence.

Heritage language learners "include immigrants and members of indigenous groups, as well as children and descendants of immigrants (Leeman & King, 2015, p. 213)." These learners, who are mostly between 3 to 15 years old (Nunan, 2011), may be ethnically connected to or may even be minimally competent in their heritage language (Bale, 2010). Research has shown that heritage language learners' linguistic competence is usually limited (Carreira & Kagan, 2011; Leeman & King, 2015) and requires specific educational programs. According to Valdés (2005, cited in Leeman

& King, 2015, p. 210), heritage language education refers to "foreign language instruction for students who have prior home or community-based exposure to this language." This area, as Leeman and King (2015, p. 211) maintain, is now "the fastest growing area" in the field of second language teaching and learning.

Although heritage language maintenance and development is usually done by parents at home (Hinton, 1999), the heritage language is usually taught to the children whose parents have emphasized the importance of heritage language and literacy (Reyes & Moll, 2005). Thus, instruction is the main practice of heritage language programs and requires planning and evaluation. Among the main issues for which heritage language instruction has been applied are developing literacy skills (Leeman & King, 2015; Valdés, 1995), improving linguistic competence (Valdés, 1981; 2005), and "raising language awareness and sociolinguistic knowledge" (Leeman & King, 2015, p. 215).

Closely related to heritage language learners' competence and sociolinguistics knowledge is the idea of developing their pragmatic competence. Although a number of studies have been conducted on many linguistic aspects of heritage learners' language, research on heritage language learners' pragmatic competence is limited (Dubinina, 2021). Dubinina believes that research in this area has mainly focused on speech act and politeness. As to the speech acts and their realization patterns, a number of speech act studies tried to compare the pragmatic ability of heritage language speakers with that of monolingual speakers of the target language or even with that of L2 learners (e.g., Elias, 2013; Keevallik, 2012; Pinto & Raschio, 2008). Other studies, however, have investigated heritage language learners' pragmatic ability with that of L2 learners (e.g., Hong, 1997; Taguchi, et al., 2017; Youn & Brown, 2013). What is important is that many of the learners do not receive formal instruction of their heritage language and its pragmatic aspects; they are only exposed to their heritage language at home. As Lynch (2003) believes, home practices are not sufficient. There are "limited interactions at home" (Dubinina, 2021, p. 748) and these interactions

may not necessarily develop the pragmatic aspects of their heritage language. Although some have tried to have pragmatic instruction at home, there is a gap in the literature as to whether instruction of pragmatics can develop heritage language learners' pragmatic competence or not. The gap is even bigger when it comes to Persian as a heritage language. Despite the few studies which have been conducted on Persian as a heritage language (e.g., Gharibi & Seals, 2020; Kaveh, 2018; Moeini Meybodi, 2025), no study has ever investigated the possible effect(s) of instruction on their pragmatic competence.

Despite the existence of valuable research on adult EFL learners' speech act production and pragmatic competence (e.g., Eslami Rasekh, 2014) there is a need to investigate speech act production among the heritage learners of the Persian language. Thus, this study tried to investigate the development of apology and request speech acts by young heritage learners of the Persian language. In this way, implicit and explicit teaching modes were implemented to evaluate the learners' performance both before and after the instruction. The study could also determine the most effective method and identify the strengths and limitations in the learners' production of these speech acts. Therefore, the current study served to address the following purposes: (1) to examine the influence of teaching methods on the development of apology and request speech acts among young Persian heritage learners, (2) to determine the degree to which the production of apology and request speech acts in Persian by young heritage learners is improved by explicit instruction, and (3) to compare the effectiveness of explicit and implicit instruction in the development of apology and request speech acts in Persian by young heritage learners. Following the above purposes, the main research question was "Is there any statistically significant difference between the effect of explicit and implicit instruction of apology and request speech acts on heritage learners of Persian?"

LITERATURE REVIEW

The field of heritage languages has been considered an important area under applied linguistics in recent years. Heritage languages are "languages that are acquired first by children but that are not reinforced by the larger society (Fishman, 2001, p. 4)." This definition underscores the significance of the role(s) that family and community play in the preservation of heritage languages. A heritage language learner, as outlined by Valdés (2001), is an individual who was raised in a household where a language other than the majority language is commonly spoken. Heritage learners frequently exhibit superior proficiency in pronunciation, listening, and vocabulary compared with second language learners of the same age. Nevertheless, research suggests that heritage language learners may face challenges with certain aspects of pragmatics and sociolinguistics, especially regarding the speech acts of apology and request (Lee & Hiraizumi, 2018).

Although pragmatics instruction has been the main focus of many studies in the past twenty years (e.g., Eslami Rasekh, 2014; Taguchi, 2011; Yousefi & Nassaji, 2019), the majority of pragmatics studies were conducted on adult EFL learners rather than young and/or heritage learners. Research has found that heritage language speakers "have a unique intercultural style in performing various speech acts" (Dubinina, 2021, p. 733) which is different from native speakers' performance of speech acts. They may not be able to acquire the pragmatic nuances that native speakers employ, despite the fact that heritage learners have an initial comprehension of their heritage language. According to Taguchi et al. (2017), heritage learners possess unique pragmatic characteristics that are formed by their experiences in both the language of society and their heritage. This highlights the significance of pedagogical strategies that are specifically designed to address the unique obstacles that heritage learners encounter in the process of acquiring pragmatic competence. Supriatna et al. (2023), in a separate study, concluded that learners are familiarized with a variety of politeness strategies; however, their application of these strategies is inconsistent. The importance of

promoting positive speech acts and politeness strategies in the classroom was diminished by the findings of a study conducted by Panggabean and Sinambela (2023). In contrast, Garabaya-Casado (2022) argues that pragmatics teaching is not necessary for heritage language learners, as they possess sophisticated speech acts and metapragmatic awareness as a result of their bilingual backgrounds. Nevertheless, he maintains that explicit instruction may still be beneficial in specific circumstances, including when learners possess a basic level of language proficiency, when they have limited exposure, when the objective is to increase awareness of a variety of pragmatic and socio-cultural practices, or when the purpose is to learn about the pragmatic strategies of another community.

Heritage language pragmatics is a multifaceted field of research that, besides the above-mentioned aspects, involves the comprehension of the cultural and social factors that influence the use of language. It also examines the potential differences in pragmatic competence between heritage language speakers and native speakers. Pavlenko (2005) concludes that the cultural identities and social relationships of individuals are significantly affected by their heritage language. This implies that heritage language learners, who are bilingual, possess a combination of cultural and social backgrounds, which may result in pragmatic transfer when composing speech acts and other pragmatic components.

On and Meir (2022) confirmed that Hebrew and English dominant speakers apply distinct strategies for making requests and apologies. It is important to note that these speakers have a tendency to transmit strategies from their dominant language to their inferior one, which verifies the existence of cross-cultural and cross-linguistic differences in these speech acts. In some cases, the strategies selected by HL-English speakers are consistent with those of dominant speakers in either Hebrew or English. However, in other cases, they develop a distinctive hybrid style that incorporates conventions from both languages. Showstack and Vergara Wilson (2020) also claimed that pragmatic practices of heritage speakers are characterized by an "intercultural style," which is a result of the integration

of norms from both their heritage language and the dominant language. The extent to which explicit instruction improves the communication abilities of participants is determined by Mitkovska (2015) after analyzing the learners' pragmatic competence.

When it comes to teaching the heritage language, it is also crucial to consider the cognitive maturation of young learners to teach L2 pragmatics effectively. Instruction should be aligned with the developmental stages and linguistic experiences of the students. The proficiency of individuals in learning a second language is significantly influenced by their age. Research indicates that the likelihood of forgetting the first language is reduced and that acquiring a new language can be facilitated by prior exposure. Schmid and Karayayla (2020) have found that young children are more adaptable language learners, often acquiring languages more rapidly and attaining higher skill levels than older learners. They also accentuate that language attrition is a phenomenon in which a language that was once widely recognized is weakened over time, frequently as a result of its lack of use. Their research on Turkish-English bilinguals revealed that individuals who speak English as their primary language may experience a decrease in their proficiency in Turkish, particularly if they have limited opportunities to utilize their native language. Drawing upon the literature, it can be claimed that bilinguals' ability to learn and maintain their languages is impacted by both cognitive factors, such as age-related changes in processing abilities, and social factors, including community support for the specific language (Bartolotti & Marian, 2012; Fort et al., 2018). In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the intricacies of language learning across various age groups, Dey et al. (2024) acknowledge the substantial impact of age on second language acquisition. They also take into account a variety of essential factors, such as motivation and exposure.

Furthermore, research suggests that the precise timing of the initiation of speech acts of apology and request by native speakers varies among individuals, as a result of personal and environmental factors, typically between the ages of 2 and 3 years (Jucker, 2018). However, non-native

speakers and heritage learners begin to acquire speech acts of apology and request during the initial phases of language acquisition (Válková, 2013). At first, they may overgeneralize from their native language or implement literal translations of these speech acts. As learners advance to intermediate phases, they begin to cultivate cultural awareness and appropriateness, which results in the increased use of polite forms of apology and indirect requests. In advanced phases, learners exhibit fluency and appropriateness in the use of a diverse array of speech acts in various social contexts, thereby enhancing their cultural sensitivity and adaptability. Nevertheless, the rate of speech act development can differ from one individual to another due to personal and environmental factors. In a study conducted by Makarova and Xiang (2022), it is hypothesized that a transition period from the mother tongue to the heritage language typically commences at the age of 7-8 and culminates at the age of 10-12. During the early stages of adolescence, this transition is associated with an increased exposure to the majority language and peer pressure.

In pragmatic contexts, the heritage language learners' learning experiences can be enhanced by strategies that strengthen their fundamental curiosity and sense of humor. The ability to understand and assign mental states to oneself and others is referred to as the theory of mind (ToM) by Matthews et al. (2018). They discuss the necessity of ToM for various pragmatic activities, as it enables individuals to interpret the intentions and perspectives of others. Westra and Carruthers (2017) believe that children's comprehension of cognitive states is influenced by their communicative experiences and social interactions. Given these facts and findings, the present study tried to investigate the possible effectiveness of instruction, particularly of explicit and implicit types, on the development of apology and request production among heritage learners of Persian.

METHOD

Participants

The participants in the present study were children from eight to ten years who were studying in international schools in Tehran in 2023–2024 academic year. Persian is their heritage language and the language of instruction in international schools is English. Many of the participants were born in non-Persian-speaking environments in which they were exposed to languages other than Persian. They had lived abroad mostly because of their parents' jobs. Of the 85 children in this study, 44 were girls and 41 were boys, including the third and fourth grade elementary students, who were selected through convenience sampling. The children were bilingual and/or multilingual and the first language of 34 girls and 30 boys was Persian. Six girls' and six boys' mother tongue was English; two girls' L1 was Turkish; One boy's and one girl's mother tongue was Kurdish; one boy's L1 was Swedish; the first language of one boy was Arabic; and the first languages of the other three girls were Armenian, Chinese, and Japanese.

The children who had a first language other than Persian had a non-Iranian parent. The second and third languages of the participants were Persian, English, and French, and other languages such as Italian, Korean, Spanish, Filipino, and German. Since it was not possible to run a proficiency test, the participants' proficiency in English and Persian language was assessed using their final grades in English and Persian courses, including the evaluation of their reading comprehension, writing, and oral communication skills. Their proficiency level in Persian was reported to be lower-intermediate. They were also in intermediate proficiency level in English. Twenty-four girls were in the third grade of school and 20 of them were in the fourth grade. Also, 20 of the boys were in the third grade of school and 21 of them were in the fourth grade (Table 1).

Table 1. Demographic information of the participants

		Total	Female	Male
Participants		85	44	41
Third grade		44	24	20
Fourth grade		41	20	21
Mother tongue	Persian	64	34	30
	English	12	6	6
	Turkish	2	1	1
	Kurdish	2	1	1
	Japanese	1	0	1
	Armenian	1	1	0
	Arabic	1	0	1
	Chinese	1	1	0
	Swedish	1	0	1

The study, following convenience sampling, included 85, eight- to ten-year-old boys and girls from two international institutions, with four classes of females and four classes of males. The participants were bilingual, speaking Persian (their heritage language) and English (the prevalent language at school). Furthermore, a significant number of the students were proficient in other languages. Forty-four students were pursuing education in the third grade, while forty-one were registered in the fourth grade. The participants had resided abroad for an extended period and were from middle- to high-income socioeconomic backgrounds. Their primary language of communication during daily interactions was English.

Instruments

A discourse completion test (DCT) serves as a concise description of a situation in which a specific speech act is expected to happen (Kasper & Rose, 2002). The respondent is then requested to write or verbalize their response to the given scenario. A written discourse completion test (WDCT) is referred to as such if the responses are provided in written form. In contrast, an oral discourse completion test (ODCT) is known as such if the responses are delivered orally.

In order to examine the influence of explicit and implicit instruction on the teaching of speech acts of apology and request, an oral discourse completion test (ODCT) was constructed, piloted, and validated. The purpose of this test was to evaluate the production of speech acts in apology and request scenarios. The test included five scenarios for each speech act, each of which was based on real-life situations for the targeted population. Five experts in the field assessed the ODCT to verify its validity before the pilot study. A pilot test was administered prior to the main administration on a random sample of 21 students from the eight participating classes in response to the expert feedback. The reason why ODCT was utilized in this study was the fact the participants' reading and writing skills could have hindered their understanding of the scenarios; however, in ODCT, their understanding of the situations was ensured.

The appropriateness and accuracy of speech acts produced by young Persian heritage learners were reviewed by two raters, who were observed to be consistent. The raters followed Taguchi's (2006) six-point framework. The rating comprises six scores, ranging from 0 to 5, and each scale characterizes the participant's performance. For instance, a zero score signifies no performance, and score five implies outstanding performance, meaning that expressions are completely appropriate for the circumstance.

Data Collection Procedure

Jalilifar and Hoseini (2021) advocated for the inclusion of a variety of data collection methods, including field notes and role-plays, to document genuine interactions. According to Taguchi (2018), the data undergo substantial variation in the analysis conducted by various methodologies. The analysis of speech act knowledge is more controlled with DCTs, whereas role-plays and naturalistic recordings may offer richer contextual insights but are more complicated to analyze owing to the variability in real-life interactions. In the present study, an ODCT was performed as both the pre-test and the post-test on paper. Courses, which encompassed activities such as role-playing,

narrative, discussion, and comic strips, were also developed. Instruction was administered to two distinct groups, each of which was subjected to six thirty-minute sessions. One group received explicit instruction, while the other received implicit instruction. Voice recordings were implemented during each classroom session and interview.

The ODCT was implemented on a larger sample of 85 learners, comprising 41 boys and 44 girls in grades three and four, following the positive outcomes of the pilot test. The ODCT was initially administered as a pre-test to assess the speech act production of students in eight classes. Subsequently, the classes were randomly categorized as explicit and implicit; one that received explicit instruction and the other that received implicit instruction. The courses were designed to improve the students' capacity to generate appropriate speech acts in a variety of settings. Explicit instruction, which involved activities such as role-playing and discussion, offered direct guidance and explanations, while implicit instruction prioritized indirect learning through activities like comic strip drawing and storytelling. Six 30-minute sessions of instruction were given to each group. Students undertook a post-test following the completion of the final session, employing the same ODCT to evaluate their progress.

Data Analysis

In order to determine inter-rater reliability, two independent raters reviewed the transcribed interviews for each question and assigned scores to each student in each scenario. Cohen's Kappa coefficient was calculated for each item. The Kappa coefficient for all items was above 0.70, and none of them had a negative Kappa coefficient, as illustrated in Table 2. Therefore, it can be inferred that the two raters were in agreement (Kappa coefficient = 0.89).

Table 1. Cohen's Kappa Coefficient, Inter-Rater Reliability

Situation	Cohen's Kappa	P- value
Apology 1	0.88	<0.001
Apology 2	0.789	0.002
Apology 3	1.0	<0.001
Apology 4	0.732	<0.001
Apology 5	0.891	<0.001
Request 1	0.886	<0.001
Request 2	1.0	<0.001
Request 3	0.759	0.001
Request 4	1.0	<0.001
Request 5	1.0	<0.001

As the first step, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was employed to evaluate the normality of the data for the intended variables to determine the most suitable statistical tests. The data distribution was not normal, as indicated by the results. Subsequent analyses were conducted using non-parametric procedures. No analysis was run to investigate the differences between boys and girls. Meanwhile, to address ethical compliance in the research, the study was approved by each participating school. Also, informed consent was obtained from the participants' parents.

RESULTS

To determine the appropriate statistical tests, it is crucial to evaluate the normality of the data for the intended variables. To this end, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, a non-parametric goodness-of-fit test commonly used in applied linguistics and TEFL research to determine whether a dataset substantially diverges from a specified theoretical distribution (e.g., the normal distribution), was employed (Larson-Hall, 2015; Plonsky, 2015). The rationale of this test rests upon its flexibility and minimal assumptions, rendering it appropriate for language data that frequently deviates from normality. The primary goal of this evaluation was to assess the normality of the data distributions for the four variables, including the mean scores in the apology and request situations, both in the pre-test and post-test. In this regard, the null hypothesis of this test was rejected ($P < 0.05$), indicating that

the data did not follow a normal distribution. Therefore, non-parametric tests were employed.

Table 3 illustrates a comparison of the performance of the explicit and implicit instruction groups during the pre-test phase. This table presents the differences in the initial performance of the two groups, as determined by the Mann-Whitney test across three categories of apology, request, and overall pre-test. In the apology section, the average rank for the explicit group was 39.92, while it was 29.68 for the implicit group. The sum of ranks was 1,337 for the explicit group and 1,009 for the implicit group (U = 401.0, Z = -1.33, P = 0.18). In the request segment, the mean rank of the explicit group was observed to be 37.88, while that of the implicit group was 31.12. Moreover, the sum of ranks was 1288 for the explicit group and 1058 for the implicit group (U = 482.0, Z = -0.19, P = 0.84). In the overall score, the mean rank for the explicit group was 38.92; however, it was 30.03 for the implicit group. As such, the sum of the ranks was 1325 and 1021, respectively (U = 435.0, Z = 1.87, P = 0.40). It must be mentioned that the number of participants in each group was 34. This table provides a comprehensive overview of learners' initial status prior to the intervention, demonstrating that the two groups' performance levels at the outset of the study were comparable.

Table 3. Implicit and Explicit Groups Performance in the Pre-test Phase

Pre-test scores/ Training procedure		Number	Average ranks	Total ranks	U	Z	P-value
Apology Situation Pre-Test	explicit	34	39.92	1337	401.0	-1.33	0.18
	Implicit	34	29.68	1009			
Request Situation Pre-Test	explicit	34	37.88	1288	482.0	-0.19	0.84
	Implicit	34	31.12	1058			
Overall Pre-Test Score	explicit	34	38.92	1325	435.0	1.87	0.40
	Implicit	34	30.03	1021			

Based on the results of the aforementioned test, it can be claimed that the study groups were homogeneous. Table 4 displays the results of the Wilcoxon test comparing pre-test and post-test scores for apology, request, and total scores (irrespective of the training type). The purpose of this evaluation was to assess the variation in students' scores following the training. In compliance with the collected data, in the apology condition, two individuals exhibited a decline in their post-test scores relative to the pre-test, with an average score of 10.5 and a total score of 21. Conversely, 58 individuals experienced scoring improvements, with an average score of 31.19 and a cumulative score of 1809, whereas eight individuals showed no change. The Z value of -6.61 and a significance level below 0.001 demonstrate that the post-training modifications were statistically significant. In the request situation, three individuals experienced a decrease in their scores, with an average score of 25 and a total score of 75. On the other hand, sixty individuals exhibited an increase in their scores, with a mean score of 32.35 and a total score of 1941. Additionally, five individuals' scores remained unchanged (Z = -6.43, P < 0.001). In total, only one individual witnessed a decline in their scores, while 64 individuals improved and three remained unchanged (Z = -6.72, P < 0.001). These findings demonstrate a substantial improvement in scores following the training.

Table 4. Pre-test and Post-test Rank for Apology and Request Situations

Training procedure	Status	Number	Mean rank	Sum of rank	Z	P-value
Apology Situation	Negative Rank	2	10.5	21	- 6.61	<0.001
	Positive Rank	58	31.19	1809		
	Ties	8	-	-		
Request Situation	Negative Rank	3	25	75	- 6.43	<0.001
	Positive Rank	60	32.35	1941		
	Ties	5	-	-		
Total	Negative Rank	1	45.5	45.5	- 6.72	<0.001
	Positive Rank	64	32.8	2099.5		
	Ties	3	-	-		

Table 5 displays the results of the Wilcoxon test assessing the differences between pre-test and post-test scores within the explicit training condition. In the apology situation variable, two students exhibited a decline in their rank, with an average rank of 5.50 and a total rank of 11, whereas 25 students demonstrated an improvement in their rank, with an average rank of 14.68 and a total rank of 367. Additionally, seven students remained unchanged. Likewise, the Z value was observed to be -4.30, and a significance level below 0.001 signifies that the improvement in scores following instruction in this context was statistically significant. In the request condition, two individuals experienced a decline in rank, with an average decrease of 16.75 and a total decrease of 33.50. Conversely, 29 individuals achieved a higher rank than in the pre-test (mean 15.95, total 462.5), while three individuals' ranks remained unchanged. In addition, the Z value of -4.23 and $P < 0.001$ imply that a significant improvement occurred in this section following the explicit instruction. In general, only one individual showed a reduction in score (mean = 22.5, total = 22.5). On the other hand, 30 individuals demonstrated improvement (mean = 15.78, total = 473.5), while three individuals exhibited no change. The Z value of -4.42 and a significance level below 0.001 indicate that explicit instruction markedly improved learners' overall performance.

Table 5. Overall Effectiveness of Explicit Methods

Training procedure	Status	Number	Average ranking	Total rank	Z	P-value
Apology condition variable	Negative rank	2	5.50	11.00	-4.30	<0.001
	Positive rank	25	14.68	367.00		
	No change	7				
Request condition variable	Negative rank	2	16.75	33.50	-4.23	<0.001
	Positive rank	29	15.95	462.50		
	No change	3				
Total variables	Negative rank	1	22.50	22.50	-4.42	<0.001
	Positive rank	30	15.78	473.50		
	No change	3	5.50	11.00		

Table 6 depicts the outcomes of the Wilcoxon test comparing pre-test and post-test scores within the implicit instruction condition. In the apology

situation variable, no student experienced a decrease in rank, and the average negative rank was recorded as zero. However, 33 students showed an increase in rank, with a mean of 17.00 and a total rank of 561. Additionally, only a single student remained unchanged. The Z value was seen to be -5.03, and the significance level was below 0.001, suggesting that the scores in this context increased substantially following implicit instruction. In the request situation, only one individual experienced a decline in rank, with a mean decrease of 3.00 and a total decrease of 3.00. Meanwhile, 31 individuals improved their ranks, with an average increase of 16.94 and a cumulative increase of 525. Two individuals remained unchanged, and a Z value of -4.92 with P < 0.001 signifies a statistically significant increase in scores for this indicator. In the total variable, no individual experienced a decrease in rank, and all 34 students increased their ranks (mean = 17.5, total sum of ranks = 595). The significance level (p < 0.001) and the Z value of -5.03 suggest that implicit instruction also significantly increased learners' performance on the post-test.

Table 6. Overall Effectiveness Implicit Methods

Training procedure	Status	Number	Average ranking	Total rank	Z	P-value
Apology condition variable	Negative rank	0	0.00	0.00	-5.031	<0.001
	Positive rank	33	17.00	561.00		
	No change	1				
Request condition variable	Negative rank	1	3.00	3.00	-4.924	<0.001
	Positive rank	31	16.94	525.00		
	No change	2				
Total variables	Negative rank	0	0.00	0.00	-5.031	<0.001
	Positive rank	34	17.50	595.00		
	No change	0	0.00	0.00		

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of the current study was to explore the efficacy of explicit and implicit teaching methods in fostering the development of apology and request speech acts among young Persian heritage learners. The study aimed

to determine whether either method significantly affected learners' ability to generate these speech acts.

This study can be traced back to the theoretical framework of interlanguage pragmatics, which explores how language learners develop the capacity to use language properly in social circumstances, especially in executing speech acts including apologies and requests (Yousefi & Nassaji, 2019). In this domain, instructional pragmatics has highlighted the differentiation between explicit and implicit teaching methodologies. An increasing body of research suggests that explicit instruction, defined by metapragmatic explanation and rule-oriented feedback, tends to be more effective in cultivating pragmatic competence than implicit input alone, particularly for learners with minimal exposure to native-like input (Kasper & Schmidt, 1996; Nguyen et al., 2012; Taguchi, 2011). This distinction is particularly pertinent for heritage language learners, who frequently exhibit robust oral fluency but lack formal education in socio-pragmatic norms owing to limited exposure to diverse communicative situations (Montrul, 2016). Therefore, comparing these two instructional methodologies yields significant insights into how pedagogical interventions might improve the pragmatic performance of heritage learners in linguistically and culturally suitable manners.

The findings of this study add to the existing literature on the teaching of speech acts and offer practical evidence that demonstrates the efficacy of both explicit and implicit methods in improving the language skills of students (e.g., Akakura, 2012; Alteo Bajrami, 2024; Bell, 2017). Additionally, this investigation challenges the prevailing assumption that explicit instruction is consistently preferable to implicit methods. Although previous research has primarily emphasized the benefits of explicit teaching methods (e.g., Behroozian et al., 2023; Eslami, 2014; Salemi et al., 2012), the findings recommend that implicit methods may be equally effective in specific situations. This finding may stem from the cultural complexities of learning within the Iranian setting, where learners' experience with sophisticated communication behaviors enables them to benefit from implicit instructional

methods—especially in pragmatics—without requiring explicit explanation. In these situations, implicit methods may be as successful as explicit methods when learners are already sensitive to the socio-cultural nuances that dictate language usage. Instructing speech acts requires an understanding of culturally particular norms about directness, politeness, and appropriateness; hence, it is fundamental that teaching—whether implicit or explicit—be rooted in cultural awareness (Taguchi et al., 2016; Darong & Neldis, 2023). Promoting students' awareness and adaptation to varying cultural norms enhances their pragmatic ability in multiple communication contexts. This finding motivates educators to reconsider their instructional strategies in speech acts education, urging them to adopt a more comprehensive approach that prioritizes both explicit and implicit learning.

It is essential to consider this outcome when formulating a curriculum, as the results signal that both explicit and implicit instruction can enhance the production of apology and request speech acts in this population. To achieve the optimal outcome in the teaching of pragmatics, and more specifically, speech acts, it is of paramount significance to implement a method that incorporates a diverse array of activities and explicit guidance, in addition to implicit cues, to ensure that the application is memorable for the students (e.g., Hosseini & Pourghasemian, 2019; Safaie, 2020). A more organic learning experience can be accomplished by engaging in productive activities. In the context of instructing speech acts, it is recommended that real-life scenarios be selected in accordance with the cognitive abilities and age of the intended audience. Additionally, it is crucial to take into account the diversity of activities that can be incorporated during instruction, encompassing role-playing, discussions, and storytelling/narration (Christison, 2018; Darong, 2024). These activities can be modelled after real-world scenarios and can lead to organic learning (Nicholas, 2015).

The designated population's availability was one of the primary challenges encountered during the execution of the present study. Another obstacle was the time restriction imposed by international institutions within

the project's time frame, necessitating that the researcher modify the teachings to accommodate the allocated time.

This research may provide insight into future inquiry on young Persian heritage learners in the field of pragmatic competence and politeness strategies used at various ages, ranging from 2 to 12 years old, to monitor the progress and development of total pragmatic competence and politeness. It also confirms the impact of both explicit and implicit instructions on speech act production and pragmatic competence. It is vital to create curriculum and teaching materials that are tailored to the needs of young Persian heritage learners, thereby facilitating their integration into their native community and culture.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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