



The effect of instruction on conventional expressions in L2 pragmatics

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Abstract

This study investigates the effects of instruction (input plus focused metapragmatic noticing) on the oral production of conventional expressions, particularly those conventional expressions which perform specific pragmatic functions in English. Using a pre-test–instruction–post-test design we tested 36 university-level students in six intact intensive English classes in order to determine whether guided metapragmatic noticing activities help learners increase oral production of targeted conventional expressions and whether such gains (if they are realized) can be generalized to other conventional expressions. Students were divided into two groups of three classes each; the two groups received instruction on a different set of expressions. Results showed that both instructional groups showed significant gains on one set of conventional expressions but not another, suggesting that learning conventional expressions is sensitive to instruction but also constrained by the transparency of the expression and the learners' level of linguistic development.

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1. Introduction

The motivation for this study comes both from claims in the pragmatics literature about the communicative value of conventional expressions and the subsequent empirical research on the acquisition of conventional expressions by L2 learners. Conventional expressions consist of strings such as *No problem*, *Nice to meet you*, and *That'd be great*, which native speakers use predictably in certain contexts. Often called *pragmatic routines* in pragmatics research, conventional expressions are described as crucial to social communication (e.g., Coulmas, 1981). In a pedagogical context, House (1996, pp. 227–228) claims, "From a sociolinguistic point of view, it is important to learn routines at any learning stage because they embody the societal knowledge that members of a given community share ... routine formulas are thus essential in the verbal handling of everyday life." In spite of their communicative value, conventional expressions are not acquired seamlessly even by advanced learners: Learners may be uncomfortable with the use of some common expressions (House, 1996); others may not link expressions to their target language function or context

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(Bardovi-Harlig, 2009; Kecskes, 2000; Scarcella, 1979); and still others may not control the form (Bardovi-Harlig, 2009; Eisenstein and Bodman, 1986; Yorio, 1989).

In this study we investigate the effects of instruction—here defined as contextualized input plus focused meta-pragmatic noticing during pair work—on the oral production of conventional expressions which perform particular pragmatic functions in English. Instruction addressing conventional expressions (known by many terms including *formulaic sequences*) has varied from relatively incidental to very focused. Schmitt et al. (2004) targeted 20 expressions of high academic value that appeared in the normal EAP curriculum. Each expression appeared at least once in the teaching materials during the 2–3 months between pre-test and post-test and teachers drew attention to formulas at some point in the course. In contrast, Jones and Haywood (2004) took an intensive approach, allowing 2 h per week for instruction over 10 weeks, integrating the use of reading passages modified by adding formulaic sequences with and without highlighting, training in holistic production, and use of sequences in the writing courses.

In contrast to the EAP focus on written expressions, pragmatics research investigates conversational production. Olshtain and Cohen (1990) contrasted two competing expressions *I'm sorry* and *Excuse me*. The instruction took place in three 20-min lessons which included use of model dialogues, discussion of differences between the expressions, explicit descriptions of differences (metapragmatic information), and an intensification scale for English apologies. In addition, practice in both listening and production was included. Whereas most pragmatic instruction is conducted as special units within a curriculum, House (1996) studied pragmatics instruction as an integral part of a semester-long communication course for very advanced students. Two sections of the course received input that included lists of the pragmatic routines. In addition all students were given tapes of their own role-play production with transcripts. The implicit treatment group had extensive production practice and also received feedback with rules, but no meta-pragmatic explanations. The explicit treatment group received explicit metapragmatic information at all stages.

These four studies showed a range of approaches to the instruction of conventional expressions and all reported positive changes in production using various measures. The pragmatics studies used oral role plays to assess improvement, whereas the studies that focused on written language employed c-tests in which blanks and letters are cues to the formula; Schmitt et al. (2004) also gave a meaning gloss: I've been watching the news report and they say that **there's a go__cha__that** the international debts of poorer countries might be cancelled (*this will probably happen*). Jones and Haywood (2004) also examined free production in essays.

In the present study we adopted an input-based approach which could be integrated easily into existing curricula in the hope of encouraging teachers to undertake pragmatics instruction where there may currently be none. We also employed a controlled task for assessment which simulated oral production in conversation.

1.1. Research questions

In this study we investigate the effects of instruction on the oral production of conventional expressions.

1. Does instruction promote the production of conventional expressions for L2 pragmatics?
2. If so, are gains generalized to conventional expressions that were not taught?

Question 1 falls into the first of Rose's (2005) three categories of research questions in L2 pragmatics instructional research, namely "Is the targeted pragmatic feature teachable?" Question 2 "Are gains in oral production of conventional expressions generalizable to other expressions?" has multiple sources. Although conventional expressions are inherently lexical and as such would not be expected to generalize, there are competing reasons for why learners could show general improvement. Noticing activities may lead students to pay attention to recurring expressions in speech, and closely related to that, they may come to understand how conventional expressions are used in interaction.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

We identified six intact classes of appropriate levels in the Intensive English Program of a large public university in the American Midwest. Instructional levels 4 and 5 of a seven level program were targeted based on earlier

research in the same population (Bardovi-Harlig, 2009) as having shown enough familiarity with conventional expressions to benefit from instruction, but not so much as to have reached targetlike use. We enlisted all the sections that were being taught at the time of the treatment. Level placement was determined by scores on a 3.5 h, four-part institutional placement exam used by the Intensive English Program with reading, writing, grammar, and listening components. In addition to the initial placement exam, Level 4 students must satisfy an institutional (pbt) TOEFL of 400 and Level 5, 420. Instruction is seven weeks long, with 165 h of instruction at Level 4 and 135 at Level 5. The learners range in age from 18 to 45 years (mean 24.8 years) and represent 11 language backgrounds (Arabic: 10; Chinese: 3; Japanese: 2; Korean: 6; Portuguese, 5; Turkish: 4; with one student each from Haitian Creole, Spanish, Russian; three students did not report their L1). We tested and taught 66 students altogether. Forty-one students attended both pre-test and post-test, and 36 students successfully recorded both pre-tests and post-test (18 in Group A and 18 in Group B).

In order to avoid researcher bias, the four teachers already assigned to Levels 4 and 5 at the time of the study delivered the instruction. They were given the lesson plans and all materials for the three classes, but were not informed of the specific research goals of the study in detail. Two teachers each taught two sections within a single level, and the other two teachers taught one section each.

2.2. Target structures: conventional expressions

Conventional expressions were identified from an acquisitional investigation of 123 learners (Bardovi-Harlig, 2009) that indicated that certain expressions were challenging even for learners at low-advanced levels. These included expressions that were tested by the original study and were rarely used by learners such as *Thank you for having me* or *Thank you for inviting me*, *That'd be great*, and *No problem*, as well as expressions where native speakers used one form and learners used another as in *I'll call you back* and *I'll call you later*, respectively.¹ Thirty high-use expressions from the previous study were identified for instruction. The conventional expressions used in Bardovi-Harlig (2009) were identified by observing authentic language use in the same university community in which the students who participated in this study also attend classes. Use by native speakers in the test scenarios was verified by two control groups: one made up of undergraduate peers, the other of ESL teachers in the same program (Bardovi-Harlig, 2009). The conventional expressions identified for the instructional component were determined by NS production at 50% or greater of NS responses (in other words a commonly used expression, in a context in which it was the favored response).

2.3. Assessment

We adopted the recognition and production tasks previously used in research (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig, 2009) as the pre-tests and post-tests. Students completed the pre-test in Week 2 of the session: a recognition task consisting of 83 items and a production task consisting of 32 scenarios. In Weeks 3, 4, and 5 students engaged in instructional activities, and in Week 6 the post-test was completed.

The pre- and post-tests consisted of two parts, a computer-delivered aural recognition task in which learners rated their familiarity with expressions and an oral production task in the format of a computer-delivered DCT (Bardovi-Harlig, 2009). The aural recognition task had 83 items with both authentic conventional expressions and modified versions and included the conventional expressions to be targeted for instruction. Each expression was heard twice; the expressions were spaced by 7 s. Learners listened to the items and reported their familiarity with the items by circling one of three choices printed on an answer sheet: *I often hear this*, *I sometimes hear this*, or *I never hear this*. We used the recognition task in this study only to determine whether learners had encountered the target expressions prior to instruction (Bardovi-Harlig, 2011).

The main task was the oral production task, a computer delivered oral DCT whose 32 scenarios were presented aurally while students read (Bardovi-Harlig, 2009). The task included conversational turns to which students responded orally and situations in which students initiated the conversation. All responses were recorded. Students had 7 s to respond; the short time was designed to promote the use of conventional expressions if learners knew them,

¹ One high scoring expression, *Nice to meet you*, was also included (Group A) to provide contrast with a low scoring item *Nice to see you* (Group B) which appears in different contexts.

given the widely held claim that conventional speech provides an advantage when planning time is short. Fig. 1 shows a responding and initiating context. (See Appendix for relevant test items.)

2.4. Instruction

In light of the multiple approaches to the instruction of expressions and given our preference for input-based activities in pragmatics instruction which may train learners to notice language use outside of the instructional setting, we centered our instruction around contextualized input and guided metapragmatic noticing (which could be thought of as input with a “boost”), consistent with many of the approaches to pragmatic awareness developed by other teachers (e.g., *Teaching Pragmatics*, Bardovi-Harlig and Mahan-Taylor, 2003; Tatsuki and Houck, 2011; Vellenga, 2008). We designed input activities for three 50-min periods of instruction delivered once a week for three weeks. We searched the transcripts of the *Friends* corpus which Quaglio (2004, 2009) found closely approximates naturally occurring conversation, and extracted multiple examples of each targeted expression to be used in the lessons, carefully preserving or describing relevant contextual features. All lessons began with an introduction by the teacher, a short pair-work activity after which students reported back to the whole class which was facilitated by the teacher, and then extended pair-work focusing on 6 conventional expressions in each lesson. The activities focused on noticing the use and function of the targeted expressions. Learners were not asked to produce the expressions on their own, although they did read aloud the short excerpts provided. Teachers received detailed lesson plans with the answers each week and returned lesson checklists indicating what they were able to cover in each 50-min lesson to preserve fidelity of instruction across multiple sections and instructors. Two teachers with multiple sections in each level were assigned the same lesson plans for ease of teaching and to avoid introduction of expressions from the opposite group. For each lesson, students received handouts which were returned to the instructor at the end of each class in an attempt to equalize the amount of input students had for each conventional expression.

The instructional sessions had two parts: A general warm-up segment in which students were asked to remember, state, or predict. For example, in the first instructional session, students were asked to predict which of a list of expressions occurred in three different situations: shopping, a restaurant, or at home to indicate the importance of

Responding Sample Item	Initiating Sample Item
<p data-bbox="212 1075 457 1099">Screen 1 (student reads)</p> <div data-bbox="260 1107 677 1403" style="background-color: #e6e6fa; padding: 10px;"> <p data-bbox="321 1180 620 1270">7. You made an appointment with your teacher. Unfortunately, you arrive 5 minutes late for the meeting. Your teacher says:</p> </div>	<p data-bbox="741 1075 985 1099">Screen 1 (student reads)</p> <div data-bbox="789 1107 1205 1403" style="background-color: #e6e6fa; padding: 10px;"> <p data-bbox="850 1174 1158 1260">9. You are in the theater. There is a group of young teenagers sitting behind you. They are talking so loudly that you cannot hear a word.</p> </div>
<p data-bbox="241 1415 694 1439">(student hears audio only): <i>Hello. Come on in.</i></p>	
<p data-bbox="212 1449 573 1473">Screen 2 (student records response)</p> <div data-bbox="267 1477 669 1779" style="background-color: #e6e6fa; padding: 10px;"> <p data-bbox="321 1544 398 1568">You say:</p> </div>	<p data-bbox="741 1449 1102 1473">Screen 2 (student records response)</p> <div data-bbox="796 1477 1198 1779" style="background-color: #e6e6fa; padding: 10px;"> <p data-bbox="850 1544 927 1568">You say:</p> </div>

Fig. 1. Sample items and screen shots from the production task.

physical context in the production of some conventional expressions such as *Paper or plastic?* which is heard in the context of grocery shopping.² The second segment had three components: contextualized written input extracted from a *Friends* episode that illustrated how an expression was used, a corresponding directed noticing activity, and an opportunity for students to record their observations about pragmalinguistic or sociopragmatic features of each conventional expression. Students were asked to notice different aspects of use depending on the expression. In Fig. 2, the noticing activity centered around *Sorry I'm late* asked the students to notice the two parts of *Sorry + I'm late* and directed them to determine in what part of the conversation *Sorry I'm late* generally occurs (at the beginning as evidenced by “hi”).

The materials were piloted with four ESL classes in the session preceding the treatment session. We asked teachers for feedback and we made two changes to the tasks based on their suggestions, namely that we present fewer examples per expression and that students be asked to do less writing of observations.

30 expressions were presented in context, 15 to each group distributed across the three class-hours of instruction, in one 50-min period per week. In addition to conventional expressions that appeared in both pre- and post-tests, additional expressions were included in the materials for both groups.

2.5. Procedure and design

We divided the classes into two groups, preserving the intact classes: Two classes from Level 5 and one class from Level 4 formed Group A and two classes from Level 4 and one class from Level 5 formed Group B. Because of the division of classes into different groups, groups A and B had an inherent imbalance with regard to level, and this was exacerbated by the attrition patterns. Thus, Group A was made up predominantly of Level 5 students (84%) and Group B predominantly of Level 4 students (78%). (Although a two-tailed *t*-test showed that the groups did not perform differently on the pre-test see below.)

Contextualized uses of 15 conventional expressions were presented to Group A (called A items) and 15 to Group B (called B items) as listed in Table 1. Both A items and B items appeared on the pre-test and post-test such that each group was tested on expressions in their noticing activities and expressions that were not in their activities (Table 3). The pre-test was given in week 2 of a seven-week session, followed by instructional periods in weeks 3, 4, and 5. The post-test was given in week 6.

3. Scoring

The pre- and post-tests were scored identically. On the recognition task two points were given for expressions reported as often heard, 1 point for expressions that were sometimes heard, and 0 points for expressions that were reported to never be heard. Because the production task involves both pragmalinguistics, that is, the linguistic form of the expression, and sociopragmatics, the use of the expression in context, we selected the single context from the original research-oriented task which best represented the use of the conventional expression even if the conventional expression was a targeted answer in more than one of the production scenarios. For the analysis, we selected the scenario on which native speaker peers (American university students at the same institution as the present students) and native speaker teachers (IEP teachers in the same program) showed the highest and most uniform use of the targeted expression (Bardovi-Harlig, 2009). That way, each expression was represented only once, and in its clearest context. Giving credit for multiple instances of the same conventional expression as a production target could artificially inflate scores: students may have learned *I'm really sorry* and as a result had a higher score because there were multiple items written to elicit that conventional expression, when in fact, it represents only one conventional expression, and therefore should not increase students' scores on the assessment.

The second step in determining the targeted expressions was to combine all expressions that occurred together in the instructional materials rather than scoring them separately. Often, the pragmatic value of a conventional expression relies on the co-occurrence of two shorter conventional expressions. Thus, the expressions *Sorry I'm late*, *Sorry I forgot*, *No thanks I'm full*, and *No thanks I'm just looking* were treated as two-part targets rather than the requisite subparts (such as *I'm sorry*, *I'm late*, and *I forgot*) receiving separate scores, which also was supported by the instructional

² At the time of data collection, baggers in local supermarkets asked customers “paper or plastic?” meaning “Do you want paper or plastic bags for your groceries?”

Activity 4: Expressions in Context

Noticing instructions: What are the two parts of “Sorry I’m late?” Why do they occur together?

What is the function of the expression? Where does this expression occur in the conversation?

What are the clues?

Contextualized sample input set:

1. Ross: (entering) *Sorry I’m late*, I was stuck at work. There was this big dinosaur.. thing.

2. Ross: Hi. *Sorry I’m late*. Where’s, where’s Carol?

Susan: Stuck at school. Some parent-teacher thing. You can go. I’ll get the information.

3. Phoebe: (entering) *Hi, sorry I’m late*, I couldn’t find my bearings.

Follow-up in which students recorded their observations:

After reading the conversations and discussing the questions with your partner, write your answer(s) here: *The 2 parts are: 1. I’m sorry. 2. I’m late.*

They occur together because together they are an apology

It often begins a conversation. Clue: it comes after “hi.”

Fig. 2. Sample activity from instructional materials (Lesson 2 of 3).

activities, which had directed students to notice their co-occurrence. Responses which included only one of the two parts were scored with ½ point. Finally, expressions that were used in both groups’ lessons, namely *Thank you for X* were eliminated from the analysis in order to distinguish the instructional groups and their associated expressions. Limited variation such as *I’m/I am* and *Thanks/Thank you* were allowed, but not tense variations (*I forgot* but not *I forget*) following Bardovi-Harlig (2009). (The alternation of *Thanks/Thank you* is discussed in Section 4.) The recoding and analysis of the data resulted in fewer total items (ten pairs or 20 expressions in 16 contexts) in each group

Table 1
Instructed Conventional Expressions in Assessments by Group.

A Instructed items	B Instructed items
Thank you	Thanks
Thank you for having me	Thank you for inviting me
You’re welcome	No problem
I’m just looking	I’m looking for
No thanks	No thank you
Thanks for + NP	Thanks for + NP
I’m sorry	I’m sorry
I’m so sorry	I’m really sorry
Nice to meet you	Nice to see you
Watch out!	Be careful!
I’ll call you back	I’ll call you later
Be quiet!	Excuse the mess
I forgot	I’m late
I’m full	That’d be great
I gotta go	Do you have a minute?

Table 2
Coding to test for treatment effects.

	Group A		Group B	
	Task item	Expression	Task item	Expression
1	R-3	Thank you for having me	R-3	Thank you for inviting me
2	R-16	I'm so sorry	R-16	I'm really sorry
3	I-11b	I'll call you back	I-11b	I'll call you later
4	R-12	No thanks, I'm just looking	R-9	No problem
5	R-19	No thanks, I'm full	R-4	I'm looking for
6	R-8	I'm sorry I forgot	R-7	I'm sorry I'm late
7	R-15	Nice to meet you	I-4	Nice to see you
8	I-9	Be quiet	I-1	Be careful!
9	I-12	Watch out!	R-2	That'd be great
10	I-11a	I gotta go	R-13	Do you have a minute? [time expression]

but more robust scores as a result of omitting some duplicate items from the analysis and adopting a stricter coding scheme for the conventional expressions.

The targeted conventional expressions are listed in Table 2.

4. Results

On the recognition task, learners reported having sometimes heard all but one expression, scoring at 1.0 or higher on all targeted expressions except *Thank you for having me* (0.89 reported by Group A; 0.94 by Group B). The recognition scores indicated that the strings themselves were sufficiently familiar to learners for instruction to begin with contextualized use rather than introduction of the expressions.

Results on the production tasks were compared using both quantitative and qualitative analyses.

4.1. Quantitative findings

To compare groups, an independent sample *t*-test was performed on the production pre-test given that treatment groups exhibited a higher proportion of one level in each group. Regardless of the treatment group there was no significant difference in their scores ($t [28.22] = 0.951, p = 0.349$).

All groups exhibited a slight increase in mean scores from pre-to post-test (Table 3); however, scores were relatively low (1.61–3.78 mean scores overall, equivalent to 16–38% correct). Both groups only showed significant differences on the B items using a paired sample *t*-test $t([16]) = 3.007, p = 0.008$ and $t([16]) = 2.336, p = 0.032$. To further explore the differences in pre-to post-test scores, effect size for each group was calculated. Effect size is a typical measure of instructional effectiveness, useful particularly when sample sizes differ (or are small). Average pre- to post-test effect sizes were calculated for both treatment groups on both types of items. Effect size was calculated using the formula: Cohen's $d = M_1 - M_2 / \sigma_{\text{pooled}}$ where $\sigma_{\text{pooled}} = \sqrt{[(\sigma_1^2 + \sigma_2^2)/2]}$. Pre-to post-test effect sizes for the students involved in this study ranged from small to medium, depending on treatment group and item type. A well-known guide is offered by Cohen (1988): 0.8 = large, 0.5 = moderate, 0.2 = small. The largest effect size was

Table 3
Descriptive statistics for treatment groups on grouped items with paired sample *t*-test (pre-to post) and effect size.

Group	N	Pre-test				Post-test				p-value	Pre-to-post <i>d</i>	Effect size
		Mean	SD	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Min	Max			
A on A items	18	3.72	1.24	2.0	6.5	3.78	1.29	1.0	6.0	0.873	0.03	Small
A on B items	18	1.61	0.99	0.0	4.0	3.00	2.27	0.0	8.0	0.008 ^a	0.79	Medium
B on A items	18	2.89	0.90	1.5	4.5	3.42	1.17	1.0	5.5	0.081	0.51	Medium
B on B items	18	2.00	0.84	0.0	3.5	2.92	1.93	0.0	7.0	0.032 ^a	0.67	Medium

^a $\alpha < 0.05$; A items $k = 10$ and B items $k = 10$.

demonstrated by Group A on B items, with a hardly noticeable difference for students in Group A on A items. Results for students in Group B showed a medium effect size on both A and B items. As mentioned above, this may indicate a difference in items or some transferability between A items and B items. Because of the small sample size, these results must be interpreted cautiously (Valentine and Cooper, 2003). Although the medium effect size indicates some instructional effect, the small number of items and slight increase in mean scores do not overwhelmingly support instruction in conventional expressions to accomplish pragmatic functions. Some expressions do seem to be more susceptible to instruction, regardless of individual learner characteristics, and some learners do seem to show improvement when production is analyzed qualitatively.

4.2. The one-to-one principle and the learning of new forms

Bardovi-Harlig (2009) noted that in certain contexts learners preferred to use a conventional expression which native speakers did not use in that same context. She speculated that the use of these preferred expressions might keep learners from adopting the conventional expressions used by native speakers, but since the data were cross-sectional this could not be shown directly. However, data in the current study seem to support that interpretation. Learners in this study seemed to prefer the general thanking expression *Thanks/Thank you* to the more restricted *That'd be great* even after instruction (Table 4). After instruction, learners in Group B show greater use of thanking expressions increasing from use by 3 students to 17, but only one student attempted *That'd be great*. Students also respond to the Gave Ride scenario with an acceptance of the thanks using *You're welcome*. However, native-speaker peers used deflection, realized as *No problem*, in 80% of their responses (Bardovi-Harlig, 2009). *No problem* fares better than *that'd be great* in that 4 learners in Group B changed their expressions (and their pragmatic strategy), but *you're welcome* remains the prominent answer in both the instructed and uninstructed groups. Similarly, the more transparent *I'll call you later* (with an adverb) is used more often than *I'll call you back* (with a particle) even by Group A which received instruction. No learner attempted *Thank you for having me* (the lowest scoring item on the recognition task) and even very few produced the formally correct *Thank you for inviting me* (but many more attempted it, see below). The final comparison comes from *Thanks* and *Thank you*. All uses of *thanks* and *thank you* were calculated across all test items (which accounts for the very large number of tokens). Students greatly preferred the longer *thank you* at the pre-test, and although both groups received input exemplifying use of *thanks*, *thanks* lost ground on the post-test.

The preference for a single form-meaning or form-use association is known as the one-to-one principle in second language acquisition (Andersen, 1984). In the case of learning conventional expressions, this generally means that learners, at least in early stages of development, will use one conventional expression per function (such as thanking) in a range of contexts, whereas native speakers use a range of expressions to accomplish the same function in different contexts.

Table 4
Targeted conventional expressions and their competitors.

Target	Gr	Pre		Post		Competitor	Gr	Pre		Post	
		%	(n)	%	(n)			%	(n)	%	(n)
That'd be great	A	0	(0)	5.6	(1)	Thank you/Thanks	A	66.7	(12)	77.8	(14)
	B	5.6	(1)	0	(0)		B	16.7	(3)	94.4	(17)
Thanks/Thank you for having me	A	0	(0)	0	(0)	Thank you for inviting me	A	5.6	(1)	11.1	(2)
	B	0	(0)	0	(0)		B	0	(0)	11.1	(2)
No problem ^a	A	11.1	(2)	11.1	(2)	You're welcome ^b	A	44.4	(8)	77.8	(14)
	B	5.6	(1)	27.8	(5)		B	77.8	(14)	44.4	(8)
<i>I'll call you back</i>	A	11.1	(2)	11.1	(2)	<i>I'll call you later</i>	A	11.1	(2)	38.9	(7)
	B	16.7	(3)	27.8	(5)		B	5.6	(1)	33.3	(6)
<i>Thanks</i>	All	17.6	(19)	13.3	(16)	<i>Thank you</i>	All	82.4	(89)	86.7	(104)

Shading represents instruction.

^a *No problem* is a deflector.

^b *You're welcome* is an accepter.

4.3. Student development on individual conventional expressions

In addition to considering the quantitative results for the treatment groups, we see that instruction also led students to make four types of changes: Students discontinued the use of one expression for the one preferred by native-speaker peers, changed less appropriate content to more appropriate content, added or changed their pragmatic strategy, or made adjustments to the form with the same conventional expression after instruction.

Evidence for instructional effect was seen when students used an instructed conventional expression on the post-test that was not present in the pre-test. In the reciprocal thanking scenario, a shift from *You are welcome* to *Thanks for inviting me* was exhibited (Example 1). Example (1a) shows a well-formed response and (1b) shows an interlanguage form. In the examples learners are identified by their codes showing their instructional level and section (L5A), their group (GA), and their computer number (S9).

1. Event Organizer: *Thanks for coming.* [Item R3]
 - a. Pre-test: You are welcome
Post-test: Thanks for inviting me (L5AGAS9)
 - b. Pre-test: You are welcome.
Post-test: Thank you for inviting Ø. (L4CGAS20)

In (2), the learner maintains the same content for the explanation, but adopts the conventional expression.

2. More food: Friend: *Would you like some more?* [Item R19]
 - Pre-test: No thank you, I am enough
 - Post-test: Thank you, I am full (4CGAS7)

In cases where the targeted conventional expression was not produced, instructional effects seemed to be apparent in cases where students added a pragmatic strategy, but not the same content, form, or expression. Some students added an explanation to their refusals.

3. Shopping, No help: Salesperson: *Can I help you?* [Item R12]
 - Pre-test: No, No thank you
 - Post-test: No thank you, I'm going to be by myself (L4CGA16)

In addition, instructional effects seemed apparent in cases where students adjusted their pragmatic strategies between the pre- and post-test. In Examples (4)–(7) students adopted a completely different strategy from the one used at the pretest. In (4) the student moves from a greeting alone, to a request for some time, and in (5) from a greeting of sorts to an apology for being late, in (6), the student adds the thanking expression that was missing in the pre-test, and in (7) in the post-test the learner uses *No thanks* rather than *just looking*.

4. Request time to talk [R13, target: Do you have a minute?]
 - Pre-test: Hi teacher, hi teacher
 - Post-test: Cuse, cuse me You have time for me? (L4CGA16)
5. Late 5 min: Teacher says: *Come in!* [R7]
 - Pre-test: Yes, may I start, All right?
 - Post-test: Thank you, I was later, I was late, sorry. (L4CGA16)
6. More food: Friend says: *Would you like some more?*
 - Pre-test: No, I'm full
 - Post-test: No thanks, I'm full (L5AGAS6)
7. Shopping, no help: Salesperson says: *Can I help you?*
 - Pre-test: No, I just looking around.
 - Post-test: No thanks. (L5AGAS6)

Finally, some learners showed development of the form of the target conventional expressions.

8. Changes in form

- a. Pre-test: Be carefully
Post-test: Be careful (L5CGBS4)
- b. Pre-test: I'll call you late
Post-test: I'll call you later (L5CGAS9)
- c. Pre-test: I'm sorry for being lating
Post-test: Oh, I'm sorry I was late (L5BGAS6)
- d. Pre-test: Thank you very much for inviting (R14)
Post-test: Thanks for inviting me (R3) [L5AGAS8]

Another type of attention to form is seen in the increased colloquial level of expressions.

9. More food

- a. Pre-test: No thank you, I'm very full
Post-test: No thanks, I'm really full³ (L5CGBS2)
- b. Pre-test: No thank you, I'm full
Post-test: No thanks I'm full (L5CGAS9)

It is important to note that many of the changes discussed above are not reflected in the quantitative analysis. In the pre-test when a student uses *no thank you* which is targetlike, and the explanation "I am enough," the learner earns one-half point; in the post-test the explanation *I am full* is targetlike, but the thanking expression is positive (*Thanks*) rather than negative (*No thanks*), although negative thanks was always used in this context by native speakers; in this case, there is no net change.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The quantitative results showed that students in Group B improved significantly on the conventional expressions on which they were instructed. Interestingly, Group A also improved significantly on the conventional expressions presented to Group B. Neither group showed a significant increase on the conventional expressions presented to Group A. As shown in the qualitative results, learners improved in multiple ways, only some of which were captured quantitatively. The results suggest nuanced answers to our research questions.

1. Does instruction promote the production of conventional expressions for L2 pragmatics?
2. If so, are gains generalized to conventional expressions that were not taught?

The presentation of contextualized examples paired with guided metapragmatic noticing activities seems to promote the use of some conventional expressions, especially when those expressions are relatively transparent and consistent with the learners' current interlanguage grammar. Production of exact matches to conventional expressions is constrained by learners' interlanguage grammar; nevertheless, as a close analysis of learner production shows, learners do attempt contextually appropriate conventional expressions even when the grammar of the conventional expression has either not been acquired or is exceeded by the learners' grammar.

At the same time that we found gains which can be attributed to instruction, the quantitative analysis also shows the gains to be modest. Nevertheless, we believe that changes in the instruction could yield more robust results, although still constrained by both learner grammatical level, the transparency of the conventional expressions, and the existence of competing alternatives to the conventional expressions targeted for instruction. Although we provided direct metapragmatic focus for the input, we did not include production activities. Our study has shown that noticing can effect changes in the L2 pragmatic system, but the question remains whether learners would benefit more from the same amount of class time if production activities are included.

In presenting the input, we used written excerpts of the television transcripts rather than TV clips. Although written input has the advantage of being parsed for the learners, it has the disadvantage of not matching the mode of

³ Olshtain and Cohen (1990) included *really* as an instructional target to replace *very*.

production (recall that the production assessment was oral). Moreover, aural input would give students a model for production that includes tone of voice, stress, intonation, rhythm, and pronunciation of words. This could give students increased confidence in production on the post-test.

During instruction, students engaged in noticing activities in pairs. Although we provided metapragmatic instructions about what to notice in each context, we do not know if all the pairs were equally able to complete the noticing activities. Having more than one instructor may result in slightly different approaches to the activities, even when using the same prepared materials. Length of instruction may also be an issue. We used three full class-hours distributed over three weeks for instruction. This was longer than some studies (cf. Olshtain and Cohen, 1990) and shorter than others (House, 1996). Furthermore, learners were also residents in the host environment where the expressions are common, and so improvement may not be solely from instruction.

Given robust learner preference for “all purpose” expressions rather than specific ones, it may be useful to include explicit discussion of contrasts in the materials, as in Olshtain and Cohen (1990). The task, as always when working with the instruction of conventional expressions, is to identify expressions that are worth knowing that learners do not know yet. The results of this study suggest that further development of instruction aimed at facilitating the acquisition of conventional expressions in L2 pragmatics is both warranted and worthwhile.

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Appendix

Pre- and Post-test Items (script and instructions)

Part A

Instructions. Initiating Utterances

In this part of the task, you will see a description on the screen. Read along with the speaker. Imagine that you are speaking to a friend. When you see “you say” on the screen, speak to your friend. Say the first thing you think of. You have 7 seconds to respond. Speak clearly.

Here are two examples.

Example A. The phone rings. You pick it up. (oral and written)

You say: (screen only)

NNS respondent: “*Hello*” (aural only)

Example B. You are talking to your friend from a cell phone on a noisy city street. You couldn’t hear something she said.

You say: (screen only)

NNS respondent: “*Could you say that again?*” (aural only)

Now, let’s begin. This part will take about 10 minutes

Initiators. All scenarios are followed by a visual prompt on the screen that says You say:

(The corresponding target expression included in the instructional materials is given in the right-hand column.) The asterisk at I-5 indicates that a key word from the anticipated expression was inadvertently included in the scenario.

Item	Scenario	Expression
I-1	You see your friend standing on a chair trying to reach a book at the top of a bookshelf. You know that the chair she is standing on has a broken leg.	Be careful! (B)
I-4	You are in the library and you see an old friend who you have not seen for a long time. You talk for a little while and as you are leaving you say,	Nice to see you (B)
I-9	You are in the theater. There is a group of young teenagers sitting behind you. They are talking so loudly that you cannot hear a word.	Be quiet (A)
I-11	You are at the bus stop. While waiting, you are talking with your friend on your cell phone. The bus arrives and you need to hang up.	I gotta go (A) I'll call you back (A) I'll call you later (B)
I-12	You and a friend are about to cross the street when you see the campus bus coming. Your friend does not see the bus and is about to step in front of it.	Watch out! (A)

Part B

Instructions. Responding Utterances

In this part of the task, you are talking to your friend, and your friend speaks first. When your friend finishes, you answer. You have 7 seconds to respond. Remember to speak clearly.

Here are two examples.

Example A. You see your old friend at a party. (oral and written)

Friend: How are you? (aural only)

You say: (screen only)

NNS response: *Good, how are you?* (aural only)

Example B. Your friend needs some help moving a heavy old desk out of her dorm room.

Friend: Could you help me move my desk? (aural only)

You say: (screen only)

NNS response: *I'd be happy to.* (aural only)

Now let's begin. This part will take about 18 minutes.

Replies. All scenarios are followed by an oral turn and visual prompt on the screen that says You say:

Item	Scenario	Expression
R-2	You need to pick up a book at the bookstore, but you don't have any free time today. (AO): "I can pick it up for you."	That'd be great (B)
R-3	There is a reception on campus. The organizer invited you and a few other students as well. It is getting late, and you decide to leave. You go over to the organizer. (AO): "Thanks for coming"	Thanks for having me (A); Thanks for inviting me (B)
R-4	You go to a clothing store and you need to find a new shirt. A salesperson approaches you. You want the salesperson's assistance. (AO): "Can I help you?"	I'm looking for...(B)
R-7	You made an appointment with your teacher. Unfortunately you arrive five minutes late for the meeting. Your teacher says, (AO): "Hello. Come on in."	I'm sorry I'm late (B)
R-8	You borrowed a book from your friend, Kate. You promised to return it today. She needs it for her presentation in class tomorrow. However, you left the book at home. You meet her in class. (AO): "By the way, did you bring my book? I really need it for my presentation tomorrow."	I'm sorry, I forgot (A)
R-9	You give your classmate a ride home. He lives in the building next to yours. He gets out of the car and says, (AO): "Thanks for the ride."	No problem (B)

(continued)

Item	Scenario	Expression
R-12	You go to a clothing store and you need to find a new shirt. A salesperson approaches you. You don't want the salesperson's assistance. (AO): "Can I help you?"	No thanks/thank you, I'm just looking (A)
R-13	You need to talk to your teacher. You go to his office during office hours to see if he has time to talk. His office door is open, you knock. (AO): "Come in."	Do you have a minute? [time expression] (B)
R-15	Your friend introduces you to his new roommate. (AO): "This is my new roommate, Bill."	Nice to meet you (A)
R-16	You go to ask your teacher if he will be having office hours tomorrow, and he tells you about his father. (AO): "I won't be having office hours tomorrow. My father died, and I have to go to the funeral."	I'm so sorry (A); I'm really sorry (B)
R-19	You are having dinner at a friend's house. Your friend offers you more food, but you couldn't possibly eat another bite. (AO): "Would you like some more?"	No, thanks/thank you, I'm full (A)

Note. AO = audio only.

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