

ASSESSING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF A WEB-BASED TUTORIAL FOR INTERLANGUAGE PRAGMATIC DEVELOPMENT PRIOR TO STUDYING ABROAD

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ABSTRACT

This manuscript reports the results of a research study that investigated the effect of a web-based tutorial (WBT) on 13 Spanish language learners' pragmatic development during the semester prior to studying abroad in Spain. Students who anticipate living abroad with a host family may be particularly motivated to acquire pragmatic competence in order to better assimilate into the target language culture. The WBT was designed to teach the speech acts of complaints and requests to Spanish language learners whose first language is English. The content in the WBT is based upon available empirical evidence at the time of development. Data were collected at pretest and posttest and the analysis employed a mixed methods approach. The results revealed that the WBT was more effective with intermediate- than with novice-level learners of Spanish. In addition, learners' comprehension gains were greater than their production gains. In other words, learners improved in their ability to recognize appropriate pragmatic strategy use; however, they still had difficulty producing pragmatically appropriate features after completing the WBT. It is possible that pragmatic awareness may precede learners' ability to use appropriate pragmatic strategies in their linguistic output.

INTRODUCTION

In order to develop communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980; Hymes, 1972), learners must master grammatical, sociolinguistic, and strategic competence in the target language. A key aspect of sociolinguistic competence is the development of pragmatic competence, or knowing how to use language in socially and culturally appropriate ways. Many language instructors must create their own materials for instructing pragmatics because the majority of second and foreign language textbooks fail to include any formal instruction in this area (Pinto 2002), and those that do are often insufficient in both scope and quality (Ishihara, 2010). Moreover, there are currently very few materials available on the Internet for pragmatics-focused instruction (Russell, 2018; Russell & Vásquez, 2011). Given the paucity of pragmatics-focused content

available in textbooks and on the Internet, there is an urgent need to create and evaluate online materials and resources that help language students acquire pragmatic competence.

Overview of the Web-Based Tutorial (WBT)

In the present manuscript, the authors assess the effectiveness of a WBT, *Pragmatics en español* (Brown, O'Brien, Russell, Wahlgren, & Worley, 2008), that was designed and developed for teaching Spanish pragmatics to learners whose first language (L1) is English. The WBT that is investigated in this study contains an introduction to pragmatics, two self-contained video-based lessons, a game-based assessment, and resources for developing pragmatic competence. For the video-based lessons, participants are first taken through a complaint scenario in English in order to raise their pragmatic awareness in their L1. After learning about common strategies to request and complain in English, participants are then taken through the same complaint scenario in Spanish. This allows for learners to receive scaffolding prior to viewing the content in Spanish. After responding to discourse completion tasks (DCTs) in Spanish, students learn about appropriate and inappropriate pragmatic transfer from English to Spanish, and each lesson ends with videos of native speakers completing the DCTs while their pragmatic strategy use is pointed out in real time using input enhancement techniques. With DCTs, learners respond to open-ended questionnaires that set up a particular scenario. Lesson 1 provides instruction on complaints and requests in familiar settings and Lesson 2 provides instruction on complaints and requests in formal settings. In their 2011 article, Russell & Vásquez (2011) provide a full description of the design and development of the WBT, which is open and available at www.slaitresearch.com.

The main objective of the WBT is to raise learners' awareness of their pragmatic strategy use in their L1 and to help them become aware of the similarities and differences between pragmatic strategy use in Spanish and English. Therefore, the WBT has an awareness-raising approach to pragmatics instruction—with Schmidt's Noticing Hypothesis (Schmidt & Frota, 1986; Schmidt, 1990, 1993, 2001) providing the theoretical framework for the instructional design of the WBT. Within this framework, attention and awareness are key components of learning; therefore, in order for learners to acquire pragmatic competence, they must first notice and consciously attend to pragmatic information (Kasper & Schmidt 1996; Schmidt, 1993). Schmidt claimed that learners must notice the gap—or the mismatch between their interlanguage production and the appropriate target language form—for acquisition to take place (Schmidt & Frota 1986). The user interface design of the WBT provides the optimal environment for noticing to take place because learners are prompted to “notice the gap” between their production and native speaker norms by comparing their responses to DCTs with those of native speaker interlocutors. After students reply to each DCT, they are provided information on appropriate versus inappropriate pragmatic transfer from English to Spanish. The WBT may be incorporated into classroom-based instruction or it may be used as a self-access instructional resource.

According to Bardovi-Harlig (2001) and Kasper and Rose (2002), explicit instruction on speech acts is an effective way to instruct learners on pragmatics. Furthermore, there is ample research that supports strategy training for learning and performing speech acts (Cohen, 2005; Cohen & Ishihara, 2005; Cohen, Paige, Shively, Emert, & Hoff 2005; Cohen, Weaver, & Li, 1998; Paige, Cohen, & Shively 2004). According to Searle (1969), speech acts refer to how individuals

use language to perform specific social actions—such as apologizing, complaining, complimenting, refusing, requesting, and thanking—which are, by and large, universal functions across languages. The WBT that is examined in this study focuses on two speech acts: complaints and requests in Spanish. Some studies (e.g., Giddens 1981; Pinto 2002) have shown that over 90% of complaints in Spanish result in a request to remedy the wrong; therefore, complaints and requests should be taught simultaneously to Spanish language learners. Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) framework of politeness, which informs the instructional design of the WBT, emphasized the concept of face, which is the self-image that individuals present to others. Their framework includes the notions of saving and losing face, as well as the work that all competent adult members of a community must do to meet their own and others' face concerns. Losing face refers to being embarrassed or humiliated, and all complaints—and the requests that result from them—are potentially face-threatening acts. Politeness theory is based on the assumption that interlocutors employ linguistic strategies that maintain the equilibrium of interpersonal relationships (Haverkate, 1994; Márquez Reiter, 2000) and that the social standards of a given community will determine whether a communicative act is deemed polite or impolite (Werkhofer, 1992).

With the present WBT, technology is used to enhance learners' noticing of pragmatic information in the input because native speakers' pragmatic strategy use is pointed out in real time via text bubbles that appear outside of the video frame. Sharwood Smith (1981, 1991) asserted that input enhancement is any technique that makes specific features of the written input more salient for learners. The WBT, however, enables the pragmatic features of the spoken input in the video-based lessons to be enhanced through computer technology, thus extending Sharwood Smith's notion of input enhancement into the web-based learning environment by enhancing auditory input with visual cues. The video-based lessons also allow learners to view native speakers' gestures, gesticulations, and facial expressions, which provide additional context, and are therefore beneficial for learning pragmatics via multimedia (Taguchi, 2011). Therefore, the present WBT takes advantage of the capabilities of the web-based learning environment by utilizing audio, video, and computer animation to help students notice and use appropriate pragmatic strategies for complaining and requesting in Spanish.

The present manuscript describes a research study that examined whether the WBT was effective for raising novice- and intermediate-level Spanish language learners' pragmatic awareness and ability during the semester prior to studying abroad in Spain. Study abroad participants who anticipate living with host families may be particularly motivated to learn pragmatics, or language that is socially and culturally appropriate, in order to ensure that their language production and manner are considered polite by their interlocutors abroad. These learners may envision situations in which they have to make requests and/or complaints about their living conditions, meals, and/or other concerns related to their study abroad experience, and making such requests in an L2 are potentially face-threatening acts. The learners in this study participated in a 5-week study abroad program the semester following the research study.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Pragmatics Instruction and Study Abroad

According to Schmidt (2001), pragmatics instruction both prior to and during study abroad may improve noticing—and subsequent acquisition—of the pragmatic features of the second language (L2). Martínez-Flor and Usó-Juan (2006) suggested that pragmatics instruction prior to a study abroad experience has the potential to prime students for more significant gains in their pragmatic ability and to retain those gains after returning home. Moreover, Usó-Juan (2010) claimed that strong pragmatic abilities are required when making requests in the L2 in order to avoid being perceived as demanding, rude, or offensive by native speakers. Furthermore, Cohen and Shively (2007) and Shively (2010) asserted that language students often lack sufficient strategy training prior to a study abroad experience in order to be able take full advantage of immersion in the L2 environment. Therefore, there is a need for tools and resources that help students learn appropriate pragmatic strategies prior to studying abroad.

Thus far, only a handful of studies have examined the development of pragmatic competence among language learners in a study abroad context. Cohen and Shively (2007) assessed the impact of a curricular intervention on learner strategy use for requests and apologies among 86 learners of French or Spanish who studied abroad. The pedagogical intervention consisted of a brief pre-departure orientation to learning speech acts, a self-study guidebook on language and culture strategies that included strategies for learning speech acts, and electronic journaling by the students. While the study did not find any statistically significant differences between the experimental and control groups when speech acts were rated by native speakers, the qualitative analysis of learners' speech acts indicated that there was a progression toward more native-like strategy use.

In a similar study, Shively and Cohen (2008) analyzed the requests and apologies of 67 U.S. study abroad students before and after spending a semester in a Spanish-speaking country. The researchers investigated the role of students' background knowledge and language contact on their speech act performance. Only two factors from the study demonstrated significant results: (1) the amount of time speaking outside of class with fluent speaker in the L2, and (2) having extended conversations with the host family. Native speakers rated students' production and the results indicated that while students improved in their request and apology performance over the course of the semester, their formulation of requests and apologies remained somewhat inappropriate. Unlike Cohen and Shively's 2007 study, which found that a pedagogical intervention in combination with a semester abroad resulted in improvements in students' request and apology performance, Shively and Cohen (2008) did not include any explicit instruction on pragmatics.

In 2010, Bataller examined 31 students' request strategies in two service encounters, used as pretests and posttests, while they studied abroad in Spain for four months. The results showed that learners decreased some of their non-native-like request strategies, but they did not increase in their use of the most frequently used native speaker request strategies. For example, Bataller's results showed that learners decreased their usage of query permissions such as *puedo tener* [can I have] and need statements such as *necesito* [I need], which are nonnative request strategies, likely resulting from L1 transfer. However, the learners did not increase their use of simple interrogatives

such as *¿me das el papel?* [Give me the paper?] or query ability questions such as *¿Me podría poner una coca cola?* [Could you give me a coca cola?], which are the most frequently used native speaker request strategies.

Shively (2011) investigated service encounters among 7 study abroad students who spent a semester in Spain. She analyzed 131 recordings from the beginning, middle, and end of the semester abroad. The results showed that students' pragmatic choices shifted over time to reflect socialization and instruction on pragmatics, which occurred both pre-departure and in-country. Her findings are encouraging for the beneficial effect that studying abroad in a target language country has on the development of pragmatic competence.

Hernández and Boero (2018) investigated the effectiveness of a pedagogical intervention on 15 students' performance of requests during a short-term study abroad program in Spain. They compared the students' production to that of 15 native speakers of Spanish from Spain whose ages ranged from 20 – 25. They also employed a request production questionnaire that was adapted from Shively and Cohen (2008). Prior to departure, the students received explicit instruction on requests, guided practice with authentic input, and group discussion with specific feedback regarding pragmatic strategy use in Spanish. While abroad, students engaged in four language tasks, they responded to reflection questions, and they were provided feedback on their pragmatic strategy use for formulating requests. Their analyses revealed that all 15 participants demonstrated improvements in their request performance after only four weeks abroad.

A review of the recent literature indicates that a pedagogical intervention, such as a WBT, could be beneficial for increasing study abroad participants' pragmatic ability. Thus far, however, no studies have focused exclusively on the role of pragmatics instruction prior to a study abroad experience. Therefore, the present study fills an important gap in the present body of literature by examining study abroad students' development of pragmatic competence the semester prior to travel. Furthermore, the present study also examines an online tool that was designed to help learners produce pragmatically appropriate requests and complaints in Spanish, which may be beneficial for Spanish language learners prior to an intensive immersion experience in the target language culture.

Research Question:

1. What effect does completing a WBT that was designed for instruction on requests and complaints in Spanish have on novice- and intermediate-level learners' interlanguage pragmatic development as measured by their written responses to DCTs in the L2?
2. Is there a differential performance between novice- and intermediate-level learners of Spanish as measured by their written responses to DCTs in the L2 following the completion of the WBT?
3. Is the WBT effective for raising learners' pragmatic awareness in Spanish?

METHOD

Context and Participants

The study participants included 13 Spanish language learners—seven of whom were novice-low to novice-high and six of whom were intermediate-low to intermediate-high learners of Spanish—during the semester prior to studying abroad. The Spanish program at the present institution is a proficiency-based program with national recognition from ACTFL for its teacher preparation programs in Spanish and French. Participants were classified according to the ACTFL proficiency level that was targeted by their current Spanish course. The novice-level learners were taking first or second semester Spanish and the intermediate-level learners were taking their third, fourth, or fifth semester of university-level Spanish. None of the participants were native or heritage speakers of Spanish. There were 6 males and 7 females and their ages ranged from 19 to 22 years old, $M = 20.91$, $SD = 1.04$.

The study took place during a study abroad seminar course that took place the semester prior to studying abroad. While 20 students were enrolled in the course, only 13 students enrolled in and/or completed the study. The study participants stayed after each seminar meeting to complete the research study activities, which took place in a language laboratory using a bank of computers. The study abroad seminar course is a one-credit course that was specifically designed to prepare students to maximize their linguistic and cultural exposure while abroad. Given the wide range of proficiency levels in Spanish among the students, the course was taught in English and met five times throughout the semester. Students were required to complete reflections in Dowell and Mirsky's (2002) text entitled *Study Abroad: How to Get the Most out of Your Experience* in between class meetings. The text is not discipline-specific and does not contain any information on Spanish pragmatics.

Research Design and Procedures

Research Design. A mixed-methods sequential exploratory design was employed for this study (Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann, & Hanson, 2003). Such a structure allowed for the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data followed by an integrated analysis in which the qualitative data could support, explain, or add depth to the quantitative findings.

Procedures. The study took place over a period of nine weeks in a computer laboratory. During Week 1 of the study, participants signed an informed consent form and took a Preassessment, which measured their knowledge of the grammatical forms, structures, and lexical items that would be necessary to complete the two DCTs in the video-based lessons of the WBT. Participants also completed two DCTs and the Game-Based Assessment as pretests. They did not view any other content from the WBT except for the Game-Based Assessment during the pretest phase of the study. The Preassessment was a paper-based test and participants recorded their scores from the Game-Based Assessment in a paper-based instructional treatment packet. After completing the Game-Based Assessment at pretest, all participants were given a handout that explained the conditional, past subjunctive, and imperative moods in Spanish. The handout also contained

translations for the 24 vocabulary items that appeared on the Preassessment. Participants were then asked to spend at least one hour looking over the handout prior to the next class meeting.

Approximately three weeks after completing the pretests, participants completed Lesson 1 from the WBT, which was the familiar complaint scenario. There was no time limit for completing the lesson, but all of the participants completed the Lesson 1 in under 60 minutes and none of the participants took fewer than 45 minutes to complete the lesson. Participants viewed the content of the WBT on their computer screens, but they recorded their responses to the DCTs in their paper-based instructional treatment packets. Approximately three weeks after completing Lesson 1 from the WBT, participants completed Lesson 2 in a similar fashion, recording their responses to the DCTs in their instructional treatment packets. All participants spent between 45 and 60 minutes completing Lesson 2. Three weeks after completing Lesson 2, participants completed the posttests (DCTs and Game-Based Assessment) in their instructional treatment packets. They also completed a Posttreatment Questionnaire. It should be noted that while participants' responses were recorded in a paper-based treatment packet, all of the instructional materials and assessments were delivered online via the WBT in a computer lab.

Instruments and Scoring

Preassessment. The Preassessment had two parts; Part I (Grammar) consisted of 20 items that measured students' knowledge of subject pronouns as well as their knowledge of verbal inflections for the conditional, past subjunctive, and imperative moods. Part II (Vocabulary) consisted of 24 lexical items that participants were required to translate from English to Spanish. The Preassessment is presented in Appendix A. Of note, participants were not provided with any input in Spanish on the Preassessment. One point was awarded for each correct answer, with possible scores ranging from 0 – 20 on Part I and from 0 – 14 on Part II.

The purpose of the Preassessment was to determine any deficits in participants' knowledge of the grammatical forms, structures, and lexical items that were necessary for learners to complete the two DCTs in Spanish. In order to request and complain appropriately in Spanish, it is necessary to use the correct register, formal or familiar, which depends upon the age, status, relationship and/or social distance of the interlocutor. Therefore, knowledge and use of the correct subject pronoun is of paramount importance in Spanish. Furthermore, students would need to use the Spanish imperative mood in order to formulate pragmatically appropriate complaints/requests in familiar settings. Similarly, in order to formulate pragmatically appropriate requests/complaints in formal settings, students would need to use the conditional and past subjunctive moods.

DCTs and Scoring Rubric. Two DCTs were created for this study, which were used as pretests and posttests. They were similar to the DCTs (in Spanish) from the WBT in terms of the level of the linguistic politeness, pragmatic strategies, grammar, and vocabulary that were required to realize the DCTs in Spanish. Participants' responses were scored using a rubric to assess their pragmatic accuracy and strategy use in familiar (DCT 1) and formal (DCT 2) complaint scenarios. For the familiar DCT, participants were given the following scenario (translated from Spanish):

You are in Cádiz and you wake up at 8:00 in the morning because your classes begin at 9:30. You have to leave the apartment at 9:10 in order to arrive at the university on time. You are staying with a family in Cádiz: the mother is Rocío, the father is Paco, and their daughter is María José. The daughter is 18 years old. The apartment has a large family room, a kitchen, three bedrooms, and two bathrooms. One bathroom is inside the parents' bedroom and the other you have to share with María José. Upon waking up, you want to use the bathroom, but every day María José is in there and she never comes out until 8:50 in the morning. You have arrived at the university late three times this week, and yesterday your professor told you that you have to arrive on time or she is going to lower your grade. María José is your friend, but she spends too much time in the bathroom each morning. You want her to share the bathroom with you so that you can arrive at the university on time. What do you say to María José?

For the formal DCT, participants were given the following scenario (translated from Spanish):

You are in Madrid and you have just finished dinner at a restaurant near your hotel. You ask for the bill. You see that your food cost 10 euros and your drink cost 3 euros; therefore, the total bill was 13 euros. You give the waiter a 20 euro bill. However, when the waiter brings you the change, you see that he only returned 3 euros to you. You know that the waiters don't receive big tips in Spain and you need your change to buy a metro ticket tonight. What do you say to the waiter?

The DCTs in Spanish that were used as pre- and posttests and the scoring rubrics are presented in Appendix B. Scores for DCT 1 (the familiar complaint) ranged from 0 – 6 points and scores from DCT 2 (the formal complaint) ranged from 0 – 7 points. Participants' responses to the DCTs were scored by two raters (interrater reliability: weighted Kappa = 0.93).

Game-Based Assessment. The Game-Based Assessment required learners to examine responses from the DCTs and to determine which statements were made by native speakers (using appropriate pragmatic strategies) and which were made by Spanish language learners (using inappropriate pragmatic strategies). For the assessment, two talk bubbles titled *Native Speaker* and *Nonnative Speaker* appear in the middle of the page. Learners are given four statements and are prompted to drag the letter next to each statement to the correct talk bubble. After categorizing the statements, learners are required to check their answers before moving on to the next page. There are four pages in the assessment, for a total of 16 different statements that must be categorized as either pragmatically appropriate or pragmatically inappropriate. Participants had to categorize all four statements on each page correctly in order to receive 1 point; therefore, scores on the Game-Based Assessment ranged from 0 – 4.

Posttreatment Questionnaire. The Posttreatment Questionnaire contained five open-ended items that measured learners' awareness of pragmatics and pragmatic strategy use in Spanish. Items from the posttreatment questionnaire were examined qualitatively using discourse analysis. The Posttreatment Questionnaire is presented in Appendix C.

Analyses

Quantitative Analyses. To determine if there was a significant increase in students' interlanguage pragmatic development as a result of completing the WBT, rubric scores from the pre- and posttests for the whole group and for each subgroup (novice and intermediate) were subjected to a paired samples *t*-test, with the Bonferroni adjustment applied for the set of tests ($p < 0.0167$). Pre- and posttest scores from the Game-Based Assessment were also subjected to a paired samples *t*-test to determine if there were any significant increases in participants' scores between the two times of testing. Furthermore, independent samples *t*-tests were performed to ascertain whether there were statistically significant differences between the groups at pre- and posttest, with the Bonferroni adjustment applied for the set of tests ($p < 0.0125$).

Qualitative Analysis. The DCTs that participants completed in both English and Spanish from Lessons 1 and 2 of the WBT and the two DCTs that served as pre- and posttests were examined qualitatively using discourse analysis to determine whether learners' pragmatic awareness was raised. In addition, the five open-ended responses from the Posttreatment Questionnaire were examined qualitatively, focusing on the particular linguistic features used, to determine if learners' pragmatic awareness was raised as a result of exposure to the WBT.

RESULTS

Preassessment

No participants—whether novice or intermediate—were able to conjugate regular verbs correctly in either the conditional or the past subjunctive in Spanish. Only 1 of 7 novice and 2 of 6 intermediate students were able to provide the correct familiar command forms for regular and irregular verbs. With respect to the lexical items, on average, novice students were only able to translate 19% of the key vocabulary items from English to Spanish; conversely, intermediate students were able to translate 71% of the key vocabulary items from English to Spanish.

Quantitative Results

Research Question 1. The first research question examined whether exposure to the WBT resulted in gains in learners' interlanguage pragmatic development. To answer this question, participants' scores on the pre- and posttests were examined using paired samples *t*-tests. Participants' mean scores on DCT 1 (familiar complaint scenario) and DCT 2 (formal complaint scenario) at pre- and posttest are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Scores on DCT 1 and DCT 2 by Group at Pretest and Posttest

Group	Mean	SD
Mean Scores for DCT 1 (Familiar Compliant) Pretest (Range: 0 – 6)		
Whole Group (n = 13)	3.12	1.14
Novice Sub-group (n = 7)	3.29	0.99
Intermediate Sub-group (n = 6)	2.92	1.36
Mean Scores for DCT 2 (Formal Complaint) Pretest (Range: 0 – 7)		
Whole Group (n = 13)	2.08	0.79
Novice Subgroup (n = 7)	1.79	0.99
Intermediate Subgroup (n = 6)	2.42	0.20
Mean Scores for DCT 1 (Familiar Complaint) Posttest (Range: 0 – 6)		
Whole Group (n = 13)	3.50	0.89
Novice Subgroup (n = 7)	3.57	1.05
Intermediate Subgroup (n = 6)	3.42	0.74
Mean Scores for DCT 2 (Formal Complaint) Posttest (Range: 0 – 7)		
Whole Group (n = 13)	2.58	0.79
Novice Subgroup (n = 7)	2.07	0.45
Intermediate Subgroup (n = 6)	3.17	0.68

A visual examination of Table 1 indicates that mean scores for both DCT 1 and DCT 2 appear to be slightly higher at posttest compared to pretest for both the whole group and for each subgroup. Data were subjected to paired samples *t*-tests to determine if these differences were significant.

The results of the paired samples *t*-tests for DCT 1 are listed below:

- (1) No significance for the whole group (n = 13), $t(12) = 1.11, p > 0.0167$
- (2) No significance for the novice subgroup (n = 7), $t(6) = 0.79, p > 0.0167$
- (3) No significance for the intermediate subgroup (n = 6), $t(5) = 0.76, p > 0.0167$.

The results of the paired samples *t*-tests for DCT 2 are listed below:

- (1) No significance for the whole group (n = 13), $t(12) = 1.97, p > 0.0167$
- (2) No significance for the novice subgroup (n = 7), $t(6) = 0.68, p > 0.0167$
- (3) No significance for the intermediate subgroup (n = 6), $t(5) = 3.0, p > 0.0167$.

Although the p value for the intermediate subgroup for DCT 2 was approaching significance ($p = .03$), the results of the paired samples t -tests listed above did not indicate any statistically significant differences when the Bonferroni adjustment was applied to the set of tests to ensure that the Type I error rate was not inflated due to performing multiple t -tests for this analysis. Of note, while the novice group appeared to score slightly higher than the intermediate group on DCT 1, the familiar complaint scenario, at both pretest and posttest, these differences were not statistically significant.

In addition to examining the rubric scores for the DCTs that were used as pre- and posttests, participants' pre- and posttest scores on the Game-Based Assessment were also examined to determine if there was any increase in their interlanguage pragmatic development. The pre- and posttest scores on the Game-Based assessment showed an overall pattern of improvement. As can be seen in Table 2 below, eight of the thirteen students showed an increase from pre- to posttest, and only one student's score decreased on the posttest. Five students' scores remained consistent; however, it is worth noting that two of these five students who were novice-level Spanish learners scored zero on the pretest and showed no improvement on the posttest, which perhaps suggests that the WBT may be too advanced for novice-level learners. However, the majority of students showed a positive change from pre- to posttest.

Table 2. Scores on Game-Based Assessment

	Pre1	Pre2	Pre3	Pre4	Post1	Post2	Post3	Post4	Change
Participant 1	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	+1
Participant 2	0	0	0	0	0	0	--	0	--
Participant 3	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	+1
Participant 4	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	-1
Participant 5	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	+2
Participant 6	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0
Participant 7	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
Participant 8	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	+1
Participant 9	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	+1
Participant 10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Participant 11	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	+3
Participant 12	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	+1
Participant 13	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	+1
Total	6	3	6	3	9	8	4	7	+10

In order to determine if the increases on the Game-Based Assessment were statistically significant, participants' pre- and posttest scores were subjected to a paired samples t -test. This analysis revealed a significant difference between the mean scores observed at the two times of testing, $t(12) = 2.74$; $p = 0.018$. Mean scores were significantly higher at posttest ($M = 2.15$, $SD = 1.21$) than at pretest ($M = 1.39$, $SD = 1.12$). The observed difference between the mean scores was 0.77 and the 95% confidence interval for the difference between means extended from 0.16 to 1.38. The effect size was computed as $d = .75$, which is a medium effect size.

Research Question 2. The second research question investigated whether there was a differential performance between novice- and intermediate-level learners with respect to their pragmatic strategy use. In order to determine if there were between group differences at pre- and posttest, novice and intermediate subgroup scores for DCT 1 and DCT 2 were subjected to independent samples *t*-tests and the Bonferroni adjustment was applied for the set of tests.

For DCT 1 (the familiar complaint scenario), the inferential results were the following:

- (1) There were no significant group differences at pretest between the novice and intermediate subgroups, $t(11) = 0.57, p > 0.025$
- (2) There were no significant group differences at posttest between the novice and intermediate subgroups, $t(11) = 0.30, p > 0.025$.

For DCT 2 (the formal complaint scenario), the inferential results were the following:

- (1) There were no significant group differences at pretest between the novice and intermediate subgroups, $t(11) = 1.52, p > 0.025$.
- (2) There was a highly significant group difference at posttest between the novice and intermediate subgroups, $t(11) = 3.47, p = 0.005$.

Therefore, the inferential results indicated that the intermediate group ($M = 3.17, SD = 0.68$) performed significantly better than the novice group ($M = 2.07, SD = 0.45$) on the formal complaint at posttest. The observed difference between means was 1.10 and the 95% confidence interval for the difference between means extended from 0.40 to 1.79. The effect size was computed as $d = 1.93$, which is a very large effect size.

Research Question 3. The third research question investigated whether the WBT was effective for raising learners' pragmatic awareness in Spanish. The qualitative analysis below addressed this research question.

Qualitative Results

The following items were examined qualitatively to determine if learners demonstrated pragmatic awareness: (1) responses to the DCTs from the WBT in English, (2) responses to the DCTs from the WBT in Spanish, (3) responses to the DCTs (DCT 1 and DCT 2) that served as pre- and posttests in the present study, and (4) responses to the open-ended items from the Posttreatment Questionnaire. The results of the qualitative analysis are presented below.

Transfer of L1 Politeness Strategies? Lesson 1 of the WBT asked students to respond to the same situation in English and in Spanish. The scenario required the student to ask a roommate to turn down loud music so that s/he could study for an exam. Table 3 below shows the most common lexical and syntactic strategies students used by students to realize this request, and compares their frequencies in English and Spanish.

Table 3. Most Common Lexical and Syntactic Strategies Used for Realizing Request

Feature	English	Spanish
<i>Por favor/Please</i>	10	10
<i>Gracias/Thanks</i>	0	2
<i>A little, A bit</i>	2	1
<i>I'm sorry</i>	1	0
<i>Amiga/Friend</i>	1	1
<i>(listen) together</i>	1	1
Interrogative	8	1
Imperative	3	5
Infinitive	0	5
Modals (<i>can, would, will</i>)	9	1
Need statements	1	2

As can be seen, the lexical strategy students used most commonly in both languages was *please/por favor*. Greater differences are noted with respect to syntactic structures. Specifically, students tended to use far more interrogative forms and modal verbs in English than in Spanish. This is consistent with norms in both their L1 and L2. In addition, students used more imperative forms in Spanish than they did in English, and this, too, is a trend that is consistent with both L1 and L2 norms. However, students also showed a frequent reliance of the infinitive form of the verb in Spanish, which most likely reflects their lack of mastery of inflectional morphology in the L2.

These results suggest that students are familiar with—and can easily produce—the most conventional lexical and phrasal politeness markers in Spanish (*por favor, gracias, etc.*) This is unsurprising, given that such forms circulate in popular culture and mass media, even in largely monolingual, Anglophone contexts within the U.S. Whether or not their use of these forms in Spanish-speaking contexts is target-like is a different issue, and will be discussed below in more detail.

The next finding is that students did not transfer the modal+interrogative construction—(e.g., *Will you please stop playing your music so loud? Can you please turn your music down?*), which is a dominant pattern in English requests—to their L2 Spanish requests. Instead, most students used either the imperative form to realize their requests in Spanish (which is consistent with the Spanish preference for directness), or they relied on the infinitive form—which is not correct, and which suggests a lack of mastery of verbal inflections. In this case, the fact that the literal translation of their dominant L1 request forms would require knowledge and proficiency with more morphosyntactic complexity is a felicitous coincidence: students did not translate these structures to the L2. Instead, they chose to rely on morphosyntactically simpler forms: either the imperative (correct), or the infinitive (incorrect, yet also most likely the first form of the verb that they encounter in textbooks and other instructional contexts).

Finally, although the sample size is far too small to be conclusive, the findings suggest that students would benefit from further instructional interventions related to the use of downgraders/hedges in Spanish, such as the terms *could you* or *would you*—as well as perhaps

additional strategies for “softening” the force of a request, beyond the most conventional/stereotypical forms, with which they are clearly familiar already.

Use of Conventional Politeness Formulae. The overall use of other conventional lexical/phrasal politeness formulae (*gracias, lo siento*) decreased from pre- to posttest, as can be seen in the Table 4, which provides total frequencies for all the students in the sample. An interesting difference can be seen between students’ use of conventional politeness strategies in Situation 2 (waiter) and Situation 1 (roommate). Although students’ use of these strategies decreased in both situations on the posttest, there was a tendency to use more politeness strategies with the waiter than the roommate, suggesting that students may be sensitive to the variable of social distance, and that they may feel it necessary to use more politeness strategies with an interlocutor who is a non-intimate.

Table 4. Use of Conventionally Polite Lexical/Phrasal Expressions in Spanish Produced by all Students

Feature	Pretest (1) waiter	Pretest (2) roommate	Posttest (1) waiter	Posttest (1) Roommate	Total
<i>Por favor</i>	7	9	10	4	30
<i>Perdón</i>	7	2	3	1	13
<i>Lo siento</i>	2	0	0	0	2
<i>Señor</i>	3	0	4	0	7
<i>Gracias</i>	2	2	0	2	6
Total	21	13	17	7	58

Use of *por favor*. On the Posttreatment Questionnaire, when asked to list one specific example of what they learned from the WBT, 8 of 13 students’ responses included some indication of greater metalinguistic awareness. For example, many referred to the Spanish preference for directness over indirectness. As one student offered a response that contrasted linguistic politeness in English and Spanish: “Don’t “sugarcoat” commands like we do in English.” Furthermore, 5 of these 8 students specifically mentioned learning about the use of “*please*” in the WBT, as can be seen in Table 5 below.

Table 5. Responses to Posttreatment Questionnaire for Item 2

Item 2	What did you learn from completing the WBT? Please give at least one specific example.
Participant 1	How to speak to native speakers better so they don’t get offended. And trying to sound more native-like: not say <i>please</i> or I’m sorry a lot.
Participant 4	I learned the rules of speaking Spanish. For example, when to say <i>please</i> and when not to.
Participant 8	That you do not have to use <i>please</i> or will you or words like that a lot in Spain. They are more direct.

Participant 10	To be as polite as I would be when making complaints were correcting something. The use of <i>please</i> and other words that “soften the blow”
Participant 13	How to deal with certain situations. I learned that they do not say <i>please</i> a lot.

However, when examining their production on situation 1 (with the waiter), there was actually a slight increase in the students’ use of *por favor* from the pretest to the posttest: see columns 2 and 6 in Table 6 below.

Table 6. The use of *por favor* by Students who Expressed Metalinguistic Awareness about this Feature on the Posttreatment Questionnaire

Student**	Pretest (1)	Pretest (2)	Posttest (1)	Posttest (2)
Participant 1	X	X	[wrote, then crossed out!]	
Participant 4	X	X	XX	
Participant 8		X	X	X
Participant 10		X	X	
Participant 13	X	X	X	
Totals	3/5	5/5	4/5	1/5

In contrast, in situation 2 (with the roommate), the use of *por favor* decreased substantially (i.e., 4 of 5 students who used it on the pretest did not use it on the posttest). This suggests that while students may be more comfortable omitting conventionally polite forms with familiar interlocutors, such as a roommate, they seem to be much more reluctant to do so with unfamiliar interlocutors in situations where there is greater social distance (such as in a service encounter with a waiter).

Therefore, an examination of participants’ discourse demonstrates that they did show some improvements in their pragmatic strategy use for making requests after completing the WBT. For example, the significant decrease in the use of *por favor* demonstrates a movement toward more native-like pragmatic strategy use with respect to this politeness marker. However, students still failed to use appropriate strategies to soften requests after receiving pragmatic strategy training on the WBT with respect to this feature. Even though using hedges and downgraders to soften requests is common in both English and Spanish, it is likely that students’ proficiency level in Spanish exerted an influence because they appeared to lack the linguistic resources to formulate these structures in Spanish.

DISCUSSION

Summary of Key Findings

The quantitative analysis of students' pre- and posttest scores on the DCTs did not reveal any significant gains in their pragmatic strategy use in Spanish. However, the qualitative findings demonstrate modest gains in students' appropriate pragmatic strategy use, especially with respect to the use of conventional politeness formulae. Moreover, students' scores on the Game-Based Assessment were significantly higher at posttest compared to pretest. This finding indicates that while students may have had difficulty producing pragmatically appropriate features, they appeared to be able to recognize native and non-native pragmatic strategy use. For the Game-Based assessment, students had to make judgments about which statements were made by native speakers and which were made by language learners. Consequently, gains on the Game-Based Assessment showed learners' ability to comprehend (or notice) appropriate pragmatic strategy use in Spanish. Therefore, learners' comprehension gains were greater than their production gains in the present study. It is possible that pragmatic awareness may precede learners' ability to use appropriate pragmatic strategies in their linguistic output. However, learners' proficiency level in Spanish may be the key impediment here. According to Bardovi-Harlig (1999), grammatical competence may be the platform upon which pragmatic competence is built. In summary, the results from the Game-Based Assessment—taken together with the qualitative findings with respect to students' improvements on using conventional politeness formulae—suggest that the WBT was effective in advancing students' pragmatic development in Spanish.

The participants in this study were either novice- or intermediate-level learners of Spanish. Although there were no statistically significant differences between the groups at pretest for either the familiar or the formal DCT, the intermediate-level learners performed significantly better than the novice learners on the posttest for the formal complaint (DCT 2). This finding indicates that the WBT may be more effective for intermediate- than for novice-level learners of Spanish.

Implications for Practice

The results of this study indicate that instruction on Spanish pragmatics is beneficial during the semester prior to a study abroad experience. However, the WBT that was examined in the present study appeared to be less effective with novice-level learners. Therefore, instructors may wait until students reach the intermediate- or advanced-level of study before introducing the WBT. Furthermore, prior to implementing the WBT, instruction on specific grammatical features—such as the past subjunctive and the conditional mood in Spanish—may help students formulate more appropriate hedges and downgraders in Spanish, which are required for the formal complaint scenario (DCT 2). Moreover, the results of the Preassessment indicated that both novice- and intermediate-level learners were in need of remediation on the formulation of familiar and formal commands in Spanish. The findings of this study suggest that reviewing L2 grammar may be a necessary component of pragmatics-focused instruction.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

No advanced-level students were enrolled in the study; therefore, it is impossible to determine whether advanced-level language students would benefit more from the WBT than novice- or intermediate-level learners of Spanish. Furthermore, the key grammar and vocabulary that were necessary to complete the two DCTs were not explicitly taught to students prior to introducing the WBT. Students only received a handout that contained grammar explanations of the pertinent forms as well as translations of the key vocabulary items and they were asked to spend an hour reviewing the handout on their own; however, it is unclear whether the study participants reviewed and/or understood the handout. Future studies could mitigate this limitation by providing grammar instruction at the beginning of the instructional treatment period. Explicit grammar instruction on key forms, structures, and lexical items may have helped students use more appropriate strategies when they completed the DCTs for the study. Finally, there was no delayed posttest after the study abroad program ended to determine if students' pragmatic competence advanced any further after immersion in the target language country. This was not possible in the present study because many of the participants graduated and moved on immediately after the study abroad program ended. Future studies that examine the efficacy of this WBT among study abroad participants should take these factors into account. In addition, future studies could compare the effectiveness of the WBT for raising learners' pragmatic awareness and ability between classroom-based and study abroad learners of Spanish or between study abroad learners who complete the WBT and study abroad students who learn pragmatics through exposure only (through immersion in the target language culture).

CONCLUSION

The results of this study are encouraging for using WBTs (with multimedia) for pragmatic instruction prior to language learners' study abroad experiences. Given that formulating appropriate requests is difficult for language learners and that the consequences for using inappropriate strategies to formulate requests are quite negative (e.g., being perceived as demanding, rude, or offensive by native speaker interlocutors), it is important that researchers and scholars continue to develop and assess Internet-based tools and resources for instructing L2 pragmatics. Multimedia tools, such as the WBT described in this article, may help language learners better assimilate into the target language culture while abroad.

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APPENDIX A

Grammar and Vocabulary Preassessment

Participant ID # _____

Date _____

Part I (Grammar)

1. If you want to be polite when speaking with someone in Spanish, which subject pronoun should you use?
2. If you are friends with someone, which subject pronoun should you use to address the person in Spanish?
3. If you can, conjugate the following verb in the conditional in Spanish:

Poder

Yo	Nosotros
Tú	Vosotros
Él, Ella, Usted	Ellos, Ellas Ustedes

4. If you can, conjugate the following verb in the past subjunctive in Spanish:

Querer

Yo	Nosotros
Tú	Vosotros
Él, Ella, Usted	Ellos, Ellas Ustedes

5. Give the familiar commands for the following verbs:

You (fam.) study:	You (fam.) take:
You (fam.) do:	You (fam.) leave:
You (fam.) work:	You (fam.) give:

Part II (Vocabulary)

Translate the following words or phrases from English to Spanish:

The menu:

The tip:

Schedule:

The change (money):

Breakfast:

The tour:

The waiter:

The grade:

The bill:

The meal:

To lower:

To leave / depart:

To ask for / order:

To be late:

To be on time:

To wait for:

To have to:

The volume:

To continue:

To have just:

The morning:

To share:

To wake up:

The dinner:

APPENDIX B

Pre-Posttests and Scoring Rubrics

DCT 1 from Pre / Posttest (the familiar complaint scenario)

Estás en Cádiz y te despiertas todos los días a las 8:00 de la mañana porque las clases empiezan a las 9:30. Tienes que salir del apartamento a las 9:10 para llegar a la universidad a tiempo. Te quedas con una familia en Cádiz: La madre es Rocío, el padre es Paco, y su hija se llama María José. La hija tiene 18 años. El apartamento tiene un salón grande, una cocina, tres dormitorios, y dos baños. Un baño está dentro del dormitorio de los padres, el otro tienes que compartir con María José. Al despertarte, quieres entrar en el baño, pero todos los días María José ya está allí y nunca sale antes de las 8:50 de la mañana. Has llegado tarde a la universidad tres veces esta semana, y ayer tu profesora te dijo que tienes que llegar a tiempo o te va a bajar la nota. María José es tu amiga, pero ella pasa demasiado rato en el baño cada mañana. Quieres que ella comparta el baño contigo para que puedas llegar a tiempo a la universidad. ¿Qué le dices a María José?

Translation of DCT 1 (Note: The English translation was not provided to the study participants):

You are in Cádiz and you wake up at 8:00 in the morning because your classes begin at 9:30. You have to leave the apartment at 9:10 in order to arrive at the university on time. You are staying with a family in Cádiz: the mother is Rocío, the father is Paco, and their daughter is María José. The daughter is 18 years old. The apartment has a large family room, a kitchen, three bedrooms, and two bathrooms. One bathroom is inside the parents' bedroom and the other you have to share with María José. Upon waking up, you want to use the bathroom, but every day María José is in there and she never comes out until 8:50 in the morning. You have arrived at the university late three times this week, and yesterday your professor told you that you have to arrive on time or she is going to lower your grade. María José is your friend, but she spends too much time in the bathroom each morning. You want her to share the bathroom with you so that you can arrive at the university on time. What do you say to María José?

Rating Rubric for learners' responses. Highest Score Possible: 6

1. Used correct target verb forms (familiar v. formal verb forms) - 1 point
2. Used correct target verb forms but incorrect subject pronoun (<i>usted</i>) - .5 point
3. Used incorrect target verb forms - 0 points
4. Omitted subject pronouns - 1 point
5. Included subject pronouns - 0 points
6. Omitted politeness markers - 1 point
7. Included politeness markers - 0 points
8. Did not transfer downgraders (<i>I was wondering if? Would it be possible for you to?</i>) - 1 point
9. Transferred the use of downgraders - 0 points

10. Did not transfer ability questions - 1 point 11. Transferred ability questions - 0 points
12. Used direct language (imperative mood) - 1 point 13. Transferred “ <i>You need to...</i> ” rather than use the imperative - 0 points

DCT 2 from Pre / Posttest (the formal complaint scenario)

<i>Estás en Madrid y acabas de terminar la cena en un restaurante cerca de tu hotel. Pides la cuenta. Ves que la comida costó 10 euros y la bebida costó 3 euros, así que la cuenta total fue de 13 euros. Le diste al camarero un billete de 20 euros. Sin embargo, cuando el camarero te trae el cambio, ves que solo te devolvió 3 euros. Sabes que en España los camareros no reciben propinas grandes y necesitas tu cambio para comprar un billete de metro esta noche. ¿Qué le dices al camarero?</i>
--

Translation of DCT 2 (Note: The English translation was not provided to the study participants):

You are in Madrid and you have just finished dinner at a restaurant near your hotel. You ask for the bill. You see that your food cost 10 euros and your drink cost 3 euros; therefore, the total bill was 13 euros. You give the waiter a 20 euro bill. However, when the waiter brings you the change, you see that he only returned 3 euros to you. You know that the waiters don't receive big tips in Spain and you need your change to buy a metro ticket tonight. What do you say to the waiter?

Rating Rubric for learners' responses. Highest Score Possible: 7

1. Used the correct subject pronoun / (<i>usted</i>) inflection to indicate politeness - 1 point 2. Motivated use of informal subject pronoun / (<i>tú</i>) inflection to express anger - 1 point 3. Incorrect or unmotivated use of the subject pronoun / (<i>tú</i>) inflection - 0 points 4. Used correct target verb forms but incorrect subject pronoun - .5 point 5. Used incorrect target verb forms - 0 points
6. Omitted subject pronouns - 1 point 7. Included subject pronouns - 0 points
8. Used politeness markers infrequently (once or twice) - 1 point 9. Used politeness markers frequently (more than twice) - 0 points
10. Used the conditional or past subjunctive mood to express politeness - 1 point 11. Failed to use the conditional or past subjunctive mood to express politeness - 0 points
12. Transferred the use of multiple downgraders (<i>I was wondering if? Would it be possible for you to?</i>) - 1 point 13. Did not transfer the use of multiple downgraders - 0 points 14. Did not transfer ability questions - 1 point 15. Transferred ability questions - 0 points

Note: The situations in the two DCTs above were used as pre- and posttests in the present study. The situations in these DCTs were based on prior study abroad participants' experiences in Spain.

APPENDIX C

Posttreatment Questionnaire

Participant ID # _____

Date _____

1. What is pragmatics and why should language learners be concerned with this topic?

2. What did you learn from completing the WBT? Please give at least one specific example.

3. Please describe the most helpful aspects of the WBT.

4. Please describe the least helpful aspects of the WBT.

5. What, if anything, do you feel you are lacking to be able to sound native-like in your Spanish language production?
