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The Effects of Different Levels of Linguistic Proficiency on the Development of L2 Chinese Request Production during Study Abroad

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Running head: PROFICIENCY AND PRAGMATIC DEVELOPMENT

The effects of different levels of linguistic proficiency on the development of L2 Chinese request production during study abroad

Abstract

This study examined the effects of different levels of linguistic proficiency on the development of pragmatically appropriate requests in L2 Chinese in a study abroad context. The participants were 31 American learners of Chinese studying in China. Fifteen learners came from intermediate level classes (Intermediate group) and the remaining 16 from advanced level classes (Advanced group). The participants completed a Computerized Oral Discourse Completion Test (CODCT) at the beginning and toward the end of their sojourn. The participants' oral request production was analyzed in terms of appropriateness rating, planning time, and speech rate. The results showed that the Intermediate and Advanced groups made comparable gains in appropriateness rating, that neither group reduced planning time, and that only the Advanced group gained in speech rate. The Intermediate and Advanced groups showed similar patterns of change in their production of *alerters*, *head act* forms (i.e. request strategies), *internal modification* and *external modification*.

Keywords: linguistic proficiency, request, study abroad, L2 Chinese, pragmatics

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1.0 Introduction

In interlanguage pragmatics, a considerable number of studies have examined the effects of linguistic proficiency on L2 pragmatic development (e.g., Al-Gahtani & Roever, 2012; Bardovi-Harlig, 2009; Pinto, 2005; Taguchi, 2007). The findings of this line of research have shown that, although linguistic proficiency generally has positive influence on pragmatic performance, more proficient learners do not always outperform their less proficient counterparts (for review, see Kasper & Rose, 2002; Kasper & Roever, 2005). A higher level of linguistic proficiency also does not necessarily guarantee native-like performance, especially in a foreign language learning environment (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001). With the assumption that the study abroad context can potentially provide many learning opportunities, researchers have investigated L2 pragmatic development in that learning environment (e.g., Bataller, 2010; Cole & Anderson, 2001; Warga & Schölmlberger, 2007; for a review see Taguchi, 2012). The research findings have been mixed, particularly in the area of L2 pragmatic production. Some studies reported gradual improvement in pragmatic production (e.g., Schauer, 2006, 2009), while others documented very limited development over time (e.g., Barron, 2006; Iwasaki, 2010; Regan, 1995). In fact, a large number of studies showed varied degrees of change for different pragmatic constructs such as apologies (e.g., Warga & Schölmlberger, 2007), requests (e.g., Bataller, 2010; Schauer, 2006, 2007), and suggestions and rejections (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1993).

The above observations are based exclusively on examinations of one aspect of pragmatic performance, namely, pragmatic knowledge as measured by, for example, rating scores and frequency of certain strategies and/or pragmalinguistic forms. However, because

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pragmatic performance is jointly supported by pragmatic knowledge and the processing of such knowledge (Taguchi, 2012), improvement in pragmatic performance also involves the development of both knowledge and processing ability (Kasper, 2001). Hence, it is important to investigate the development of pragmatic knowledge *and* processing ability in order to better understand how L2 pragmatic production develops during study abroad. Moreover, the existing studies all focused on one group of learners with more or less comparable linguistic proficiency. Because linguistic proficiency generally has a positive effect on pragmatic development, it is an interesting question to ask whether learners who start their sojourn with a higher level of linguistic proficiency are able to gain more in pragmatic knowledge and processing ability than those beginning with a lower level of linguistic proficiency. Studies that address this question can add to the existing literature regarding the effects of pre-departure linguistic proficiency on L2 acquisition in a study abroad context (e.g., Davidson, 2010; DeKeyser, 2010; Freed, 1995; Klapper & Rees, 2003; Lapkin, Hart, & Swain, 1995; Rivers, 1998; Teichler & Maiworm, 1997; Yager, 1998), because this line of research has not investigated L2 pragmatic development. This study therefore aims to examine the effects of different levels of linguistic proficiency on the development of pragmatic knowledge and processing ability in the production of requests in a study abroad context. By focusing on L2 Chinese, a much underrepresented target language in interlanguage pragmatics literature, this study can also contribute to the diversity of the target languages examined in the field.

2.0 Literature Review

In this section, I will first review research on L2 request production development in a

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study abroad context, the basis upon which I will discuss the gaps in the literature, namely, the need to examine the development of pragmatic knowledge and processing ability, and the need to investigate the effects of linguistic proficiency on the development of knowledge and processing during study abroad.

2.1 Development of L2 request production in a study abroad context

As a face-threatening act (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p.66), request making has long attracted researchers' attention in interlanguage pragmatics. Making requests is an important daily language function entailing linguistic and cultural knowledge of a specific language community. According to Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper (1989), a request is a complex speech act that can be analyzed according to its components: *alerter*, *head act*, *internal modification*, and *external modification*.¹ Learning how to make appropriate requests can be a daunting task for learners because it involves knowing not only which linguistic forms can be used for making requests but also how contextual factors (e.g., power and imposition) can influence the choice of linguistic forms. The study abroad context can offer opportunities for learning how to make requests. In fact, several studies have examined the development of L2 request production during study abroad, and the representative ones are reviewed below.

In a series of studies, Schauer (2004, 2006, 2007, 2008) examined nine German learners' production of English requests during their one-academic-year study in the UK. A Multimedia Elicitation Task with 16 request scenarios was used for data collection. The results showed varied paths of development for different components of a request sequence. In terms of the production of request strategies, the learners continued to adhere to one type of direct strategy, yet their production of indirect strategies became more varied over time.

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Meanwhile, although the learners' choice of request strategies resembled those preferred by the native speakers in low-imposition scenarios, their choice of request strategies showed both native-like and non-native-like patterns in high-imposition scenarios, and such patterns remained unchanged throughout their sojourn. Regarding the production of *internal modification*, several lexical and syntactic *downgraders* remained under-produced in spite of a slow expansion of the *internal modification* repertoire. In contrast, *external modification* showed a native-like pattern of development: the learners not only expanded their range of external modifiers but also reached native-speakers' production frequency for the initially under-produced modifiers (e.g., flattering and small talk). Schauer explained these varied patterns of change by referring to the joint influence of exposure, motivation, L1 influence, and the learners' cultural knowledge.

Like in Schauer's studies, Bataller (2010) also documented a mismatch in the choice of request strategies between learners and native speakers of Spanish. Bataller's study focused on 31 American learners of Spanish who stayed in Spain for four months. The learners completed a role play task consisting of two service encounter scenarios at the beginning and toward the end of their stay. Request strategy was analyzed at both macro (i.e., direct and indirect strategies) and micro levels (i.e., specific types of direct and indirect strategies). The results revealed a complex picture showing both native-like change and non-change.

Regarding the first scenario (i.e., requesting a drink), the learners resembled the native speakers at the macro level in producing more indirect strategies than direct strategies.

However, the learners differed from the native speakers in their choice of request strategies at the micro level. For example, among direct strategies, the learners primarily relied on *want*

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statement (e.g., “I want a coffee with milk.”) yet the native speakers favored *simple interrogative* (e.g., “Will you bring me a cup of coffee?”), and this pattern remained unchanged over time. Among indirect strategies, the learners preferred *query permission* (e.g., “Can I have water, please?”) but the native speakers favored *query ability* (e.g., “Could you serve me a Coke?”). Over time, the learners showed a native-like trend of development in decreasing their use of the *query permission* strategy. Regarding the second scenario (i.e., requesting shoe exchange), the learners’ overall preference for direct strategies differed from the native speakers’ overall preference for indirect strategies throughout the entire study abroad period (so there was no native-like development). Overall, the findings revealed very limited change toward the native-speakers’ norms. Bataller proposed several reasons to explain the findings: relatively short length of stay, learners’ lack of awareness of target pragmatic norms due to their limited contact with native speakers, and learners’ unwillingness to adopt the target norms.

In addition to request strategy, the varied pace of development for *internal* and *external modification*, as shown in Schauer’s studies cited above, was also reported in the studies by Cole & Anderson (2001) and by Woodfield (2012). For example, Woodfield focused on eight advanced-level learners (with IELTS scores between 6.0 and 6.5) studying in the UK over one academic year. Data was collected through a role play task consisting of two scenarios (equal-power, high-power). Over time, the learners gradually expanded their repertoire of *internal* and *external modification*. However, for *internal modification*, the learners’ overall production decreased steadily over time, which represented a non-native-like pattern of development. Moreover, the production of certain internal modifiers (e.g., *tense* and *aspect*)

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was highly limited and never reached the native speakers' level of use, while several other internal modifiers never appeared in the learners' production. On the other hand, the learners' frequency of producing *external modification* clearly approximated the native speakers' norm, and sociopragmatic development also occurred for external modification. Overall, the data showed native-like development for *external modification* and non-native-like change for *internal modification*.

The empirical evidence discussed above suggests that L2 learners' ability to produce requests does change over time in a study abroad context. However, such changes may not necessarily orient toward native speakers' norm, and the degree of change may vary across different components of a request sequence (e.g., request strategy, *internal* and *external modification*). One common feature of the studies cited above is that they all focused on various measures of pragmatic knowledge and did not examine the processing ability for accessing such knowledge. The next section discusses the need for investigating both knowledge and processing in order to better understand the development of L2 pragmatic production.

2.2 Development of knowledge and processing ability of L2 pragmatic production

Among the studies on the development of L2 pragmatic production during study abroad, data analysis almost exclusively focuses on pragmatic knowledge, which encompasses pragmalinguistic knowledge (i.e., knowledge about the relationship between linguistic forms and pragmatic functions) and sociopragmatic knowledge (i.e., knowledge about the constraining effects of socio-cultural factors on language use) (Kasper & Roever, 2005; Leech, 1983, pp.10-11; Thomas, 1983). Various measures can serve as indicators of

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pragmatic knowledge, such as the frequency of using certain strategies and/or semantic formulas of various speech acts (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1993; Warga & Schölmlberger, 2007), the frequency of using various sociolinguistic forms such as address forms (e.g., Barron, 2006), particles (e.g., Ishida, 2009; Masuda, 2011), as well as forms for conveying different speech styles (e.g., Ishida, 2011; Iwasaki, 2010). The measures of pragmatic knowledge for request-making include the frequency of occurrence of *alerters*, request strategies, and modifiers (e.g., Bataller, 2010; Cole & Anderson, 2001; Schauer, 2007) as well as their distribution according to situational variables such as power and imposition (e.g., Schauer, 2006, 2008).

In addition to pragmatic knowledge, pragmatic development also involves acquiring the necessary processing ability for utilizing pragmatic knowledge in communication (Kasper, 2001; Taguchi, 2012, pp. 74-76). Recent studies have shown that processing ability is independent of pragmatic knowledge (Lee, 2013; Taguchi, 2007), and that the two constructs demonstrate different patterns of development in instructed and uninstructed environments (e.g., Li, 2012; Li & Taguchi, 2014; Taguchi, 2012). In studies on speech act production, planning time and speech rate have been used as indicators of processing ability, following the premise that speed of performance can indirectly reflect cognitive processing efficiency (Juffs, 2001; Segalowitz, 2010).

According to Taguchi (2007), planning time and speech rate reflect two types of planning involved in oral speech act production, namely, pre-task planning (i.e., planning before executing a task) and online planning (i.e., planning during task execution). Pre-task planning and online planning involve different psycholinguistic processes in L2 production and

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consequently play different roles in affecting performance (Ellis & Yuan, 2004; Wendel, 1997; Yuan & Ellis, 2003). Levelt's (1989) widely accepted model offers a detailed account of the psycholinguistic processes involved in speech production. According to this model, the first stage of speaking involves conceptualization, in which the propositional content of the intended speech is planned and generated in the form of a pre-verbal message. This message is further processed during the next stage (formulation) in which grammatical and phonological encodings of the propositional content occur. The grammatically and phonologically encoded message is finally verbalized through the articulation stage, resulting in overt speech. Drawing on Levelt's model, Yuan & Ellis (2003) showed that off-line planning was primarily associated with the conceptualization stage of speech production, and that online planning was primarily directed to the formulation stage.

Although Yuan & Ellis's (2003) study focuses on general L2 speech production, the findings can also shed light on oral L2 pragmatic production because the psycholinguistic processes remain the same. In interlanguage pragmatics, several studies have found that planning time (an indicator of pre-task planning) and speech rate (an indicator of online planning) are distinct measures of performance speed (e.g., Lee, 2013; Li, 2012; Li & Taguchi, 2014; Taguchi, 2007, 2012), and this further supports the view that these two speed measures are associated with different psycholinguistic processes involved in oral L2 pragmatic production. The present study adopts the two measures of processing ability in addition to measures of pragmatic knowledge. As such, it represents an initial effort in the field to gain a fuller picture of how L2 request-making develops in a study abroad context.

2.3 Effects of different levels of linguistic proficiency on L2 request production and its

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development

How different levels of linguistic proficiency affect L2 pragmatic performance is one of the most researched topics in interlanguage pragmatics (for reviews, see Kasper & Roever, 2005; Kasper & Rose, 2002). Likewise, among the studies on L2 request production, the level of linguistic proficiency is considered a key factor that affects performance. Empirical findings have shown that more proficient learners generally perform better than their less proficient counterparts in producing more complex discourse structures of request-making (e.g., Al-Gahtani & Roever, 2012), in employing more indirect strategies than direct strategies (e.g., Felix-Brasdefer, 2007), in exhibiting less negative L1 transfer (e.g., Pinto, 2005), in obtaining higher appropriateness ratings (e.g., Taguchi, 2006), and in demonstrating an overall more expanded repertoire of linguistic resources for request-making (e.g., Wen, in press). However, more proficient learners do not always outperform less proficient learners, particularly in terms of the ability to accommodate contextual variables such as interlocutor power relationship (e.g., Al-Gahtani & Roever, 2012). In fact, in less demanding scenarios (e.g., minor request scenarios), less proficient learners were found to perform as well as more proficient learners (e.g., Taguchi, 2006). A higher level of linguistic proficiency also does not guarantee native-level performance. For example, more proficient learners were found to either over-produce certain pragmalinguistic forms not favored by native speakers or to under-produce certain native-speaker-favored pragmalinguistic forms (e.g., Taguchi, 2006; Wen, in press).

Among the above-mentioned studies, Wen's (in press) findings are particularly relevant to this study because hers is the only one that this author is aware of that focused on request

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production in L2 Chinese. The participants in Wen's study were 48 American students enrolled in college Chinese classes in the U.S. Twenty-four learners were in the low-proficiency group and the remaining 24 in the high-proficiency group. The low-proficiency group had learnt Chinese for 19 months and the high-proficiency group 31 months. Twenty-four native Chinese speakers provided baseline data. A four-item written DCT was used for data collection. The high-proficiency group showed an overall better performance than their low-proficiency counterparts. Specifically, the high-proficiency group produced more conventionally indirect strategies and less direct strategies than the low-proficiency group, which aligned the former more closely with the native speakers' performance. Compared with the low-proficiency group, the high-proficiency group's production of *alerters* showed closer approximation to the native speakers' norm thanks to the increased production of *alerters* such as *full name* and *surname + title* (e.g., 刘老师, *Liú lǎoshī*, Teacher Liu). Moreover, the high-proficiency group also demonstrated a wider range of *internal* and *external modification*. However, the high-proficiency group did not perform better in their choice of pragmalinguistic forms. For example, in making conventionally indirect requests, both learner groups overproduced the willingness/permission-query modal verb 可以 (*kěyǐ*, would/may) and under-produced the ability-query modal verb 能 (*néng*, can). In addition, the difference in the frequency of producing specific *internal modification* forms was typically small (i.e., less than 5%) between the two groups. The implication for future research is the need for detailed analysis of pragmalinguistic forms in order to show a more nuanced picture regarding the effects of linguistic proficiency on L2 request production.

The overall positive effects of linguistic proficiency on L2 request production, as

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illustrated in the above cited studies, can partly be attributed to the higher level of (broadly defined) grammatical knowledge that more proficient learners possess. This is because pragmatic production requires exact linguistic processing of lexis and morpho-syntax to ensure the correct encoding of meanings (Taguchi, 2010, 2012, p.42). However, more proficient learners may not outperform less proficient learners in producing native-speaker-preferred pragmalinguistic forms, because figuring out the pragmatic function(s) of a particular linguistic structure and the contexts in which it can be appropriately applied may be a challenging task regardless of learners' levels of linguistic proficiency.

While there are plenty of empirical evidence showing that different levels of linguistic proficiency affect L2 request production, no study has examined whether, over the same period of sojourn, learners with higher linguistic proficiency tend to gain more in L2 request production (and L2 pragmatic production in general) than those with lower linguistic proficiency. Commenting on the mixed research findings regarding the amount of L2 gain that learners can make during study abroad, DeKeyser (2007a, 2010) suggested that there might be a threshold level of proficiency that learners should attain before going abroad in order to maximize their gain in a study abroad context. Given the influence of linguistic proficiency on L2 pragmatic performance, this hypothesis can be applied to research on L2 request production as well.

2.4 Research question

This study aims to investigate whether and how different levels of linguistic proficiency affect the development of pragmatic knowledge (as indicated by appropriateness ratings) and

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processing ability (as indicated by planning time and speech rate) for request production in L2 Chinese. The research question is: How do different levels of linguistic proficiency influence L2 Chinese learners' development of pragmatic knowledge and processing ability for request-making in a study abroad context?

3.0 Method

3.1 Participants

Participants were 31 American learners of Chinese recruited from a 15-week study-abroad program in Beijing (China) in Fall 2009. The study-abroad program, though located inside a major Chinese university, only admits U.S. college students. In this program, all incoming students must take a Chinese placement test consisting of a written test (about 90 minutes) and a one-on-one oral proficiency interview (about 10-15 minutes for each student). The written test is adapted from standardized Chinese proficiency tests and assesses listening, reading, and writing skills as well as grammatical and vocabulary knowledge. Based on the written and oral test results, the students are placed into elementary, intermediate, or advanced level classes where they receive approximately nine-hour instruction on Chinese each week.

Fifteen participants were recruited from the intermediate level classes (hereafter Intermediate group) and the remaining 16 from the advanced level classes (hereafter Advanced group). Students enrolled in the elementary level classes, mostly true beginners, were considered inappropriate for this study due to their highly limited Chinese proficiency. Because course level as a measure of linguistic proficiency has been widely used in interlanguage pragmatics research (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig, 2008, 2009; Félix-Brasdefer, 2007;

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Koike, 1996; Niezgoda & Roever, 2001; Trosborg, 1995; Pinto, 2005), it was considered appropriate for this study. Table 1 shows the background information of the two learner groups (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity). The Intermediate and Advanced groups differed in length of formal Chinese language study before going abroad, that is, an average of 2.26 semesters for the Intermediate group ($SD = 0.59$) and an average of 4.19 semesters for the Advanced group ($SD = 0.91$). An independent samples t test showed that the two groups differed significantly on this measure, $t(29) = -6.91, p < .001$. No participant had previous experience of visiting Chinese-speaking countries and/or regions.

Insert Table 1 here

In addition to the learner participants, 22 native Chinese speakers (mean age: 21.72 years; 10 males, 12 females), who were all undergraduate students enrolled in a public university in Beijing, were recruited to provide baseline data.

3.2 Instrument

The data collection instrument was a Computerized Oral Discourse Completion Test (CODCT). The CODCT included eight request-making scenarios (Appendix One) and a few filler items. These eight scenarios differed in interlocutor power (i.e., friend interlocutor vs. professor interlocutor) and in imposition (i.e., small favor vs. big favor). Specifically, two scenarios involved asking for a small favor from one's good friend (e.g., to open a window), two involved asking for a big favor from one's good friend (e.g., to ask someone to pick up one's brother at an airport), two involved asking for a small favor from one's professor (i.e., to borrow a pen), and two involved asking for a big favor from one's professor (i.e., to ask for

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an extension of a term paper's deadline).

When working on the CODCT, the participants listened to and read along on computer screens the descriptions of each scenario (delivered in English) one by one.² Immediately after the audio was done, a beep prompted the participants to begin responding orally in Chinese for that scenario. Their oral responses were recorded in computers for analysis. The native speakers responded to the same OCDCT following the same procedures, except that the scenario descriptions were prepared and delivered in Chinese. All participants proceeded through the CODCT at their own pace. Generally, the learner participants took about 10 to 15 minutes to complete the CODCT and the native speakers about 5 minutes.

3.3 Data analysis

The participants' responses were transcribed and analyzed in terms of appropriateness rating (an indicator of pragmatic knowledge) and speed of performance (an indicator of processing ability). For the measure of appropriateness rating, each request utterance was scored based on a five-point scale ranging from zero (No response) to four (Excellent). This scoring rubric (see Table 2) was developed after consulting existing rating scales in interlanguage pragmatics research to attend to both pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic aspects of request-making (e.g., Hudson, Detmer, & Brown, 1995; Taguchi, 2006, 2007). Appropriateness was evaluated holistically by considering: (a) the degree to which the speaker was able to realize the intended communicative function, (b) the degree to which the speaker was able to adopt an appropriate level of directness for specific request scenarios, and (c) the extent to which grammatical and vocabulary knowledge interfere with meaning interpretation and directness level. Two native Chinese speakers trained in Chinese applied

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linguistics were recruited as raters. Their ratings achieved satisfactory inter-rater reliability as indicated by the Pearson correlation coefficient ($r = .91$). There was no large discrepancy in rating (i.e., difference larger than one point). The averaged ratings between the two raters were used for data analysis. The speed dimension of request production was examined in terms of planning time and speech rate. Following previous research (Li, 2012; Li & Taguchi, 2014; Taguchi, 2007), planning time was operationalized as the amount of time taken for planning an oral response. It was measured between the moment when the aural description of a scenario ended (with a beep) and the moment when the participants started to speak. Speech rate, on the other hand, was measured by calculating the number of Chinese syllables produced per minute. To answer the research question, I conducted three separate 2 (group) x 2 (time) repeated ANOVAs for appropriateness rating, planning time, and speech rate. The alpha level was set as .05 for all statistical procedures.

Insert Table 2 here

In addition to the quantitative analysis, I conducted a *post hoc* analysis to examine what kind of pragmatic knowledge the learners gained over time. This analysis focused on the four components of a request sequence, namely, *alerter*, *head act*, *internal modification*, and *external modification*. The coding scheme was developed after consulting previous research on request production in Chinese as a native and target language (e.g., Gao, 1999; Lee-Wong, 2000; Wen, in press; Zhang, 1995).

3.4 Procedures

The CODCT was administered twice to the participants, at the beginning and at end of

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the study-abroad program, to see whether there was any improvement in producing requests in Chinese over time. The participants also filled out a background survey soliciting demographic information as well as information about their pre-program Chinese language learning experience.

4.0 Results

4.1 Quantitative analysis

The research question asked whether the learners' proficiency levels influenced pragmatic development during study abroad. Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics of the three measures. Statistical analysis of appropriateness rating revealed a significant main effect of group, $F(1, 29) = 25.32, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .47$, and a significant main effect of time, $F(1, 29) = 47.74, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .62$. However, no significant group x time interaction effect was found (n.s.). Additional paired samples t tests showed significant improvement in appropriateness rating for the Intermediate group, $t(14) = -6.05, p < .001$, as well as for the Advanced group, $t(15) = -3.72, p = .002$. Moreover, independent samples t tests showed that the Advanced group outperformed the Intermediate group at pretest ($t(29) = -5.16, p < .001$) and at posttest ($t(29) = -3.37, p = .002$). For the measure of planning time, there was no significant effect of group (n.s.), or group x time interaction (n.s.). For the measure of speech rate, there were significant main effects for group, $F(1, 29) = 14.39, p = .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .33$, and time $F(1, 29) = 8.68, p = .006$, partial $\eta^2 = .23$. The group x time interaction also reached a significant level, $F(1, 29) = 6.51, p = .016$, partial $\eta^2 = .18$. Follow-up analysis showed that the Intermediate group did not gain in speech rate over time (n.s.) but the Advanced group did ($p < .001$). The Advanced group also outperformed the

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Intermediate group at pretest ($p = .029$) and at posttest ($p < .001$).

Insert Table 3 here

4.2 Post hoc analysis

The post-hoc analysis focused on four components of a request sequence: (a) the *alerter*, (b) the *head act* (i.e., request strategy), (c) the *internal modification*, and (d) the *external modification*. The results were presented in Table 4 through Table 9.³

Concerning alerter, Table 4 presents the mean number of various *alerter* forms produced by each participant group. The native speakers relied on three forms, namely, *surname + title* (e.g., 陈老师, *Chén lǎoshī*, teacher Chen), *title/role* (e.g., 老师, *lǎoshī*, teacher) and *full name* (e.g., 王宁, *Wáng Níng*, Wang Ning). The Intermediate and Advanced groups both produced less *alerters* than the native speakers. Over time, the learners' production showed both native-like change and lack of change. The native-like change for both learner groups included the increased production of *full name*, and the decreased production of the two *attention getters* that were not produced by the native speakers at all, namely, 请问 (*qǐngwèn*, may I ask) and 对不起 (*duìbuqǐ*, excuse me). In addition, notable increase in the production of *surname + title* was also observed for the Intermediate group. On the other hand, lack of change was observed for the native-speaker-preferred form *title/role*: the two learner groups never produced this form. Table 5 shows the distribution of the native-speaker-preferred and the learner-preferred *alerter* forms according to the power variable (i.e., equal power status as illustrated in the “friend” scenarios, and higher power

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status as illustrated in the “professor” scenarios). The patterns found in the learner data were native-like for the use of *surname + title* and *full name*.

Insert Table 4 & 5 here

The analysis of *head act* focused on request strategies. Table 6 presents the mean number of forms produced by each participant group. Overall, the learners’ production showed non-native-like change over time. Among conventionally indirect strategies, the Intermediate and Advanced groups both notably increased their production of the two willingness/permission-query forms: 可以...吗? (*kěyǐ ... ma?* Would/May ...?) and 可以(以)不可以...? (*kě (yǐ) bù kěyǐ ...?* Would or would not...?/May or may not...?). These two forms, however, were not favored by the native speakers, who preferred the ability-query forms: 能...吗? (*néng ...ma?* Can...?) and 能不能...? (*néngbùnéng ...?* Can or cannot...?). Among direct strategies, the two learner groups both continued to under-produce *imperatives* by using the *Ba*-structure and non-*Ba*-structure.⁴ Table 7 shows the distribution of the native-speaker-preferred and the learner-preferred forms according to the power variable. The native speakers produced the *Ba*-structure and the non-*Ba*-structure primarily in the “friend” scenarios and two ability-query forms primarily in the “professor” scenarios. However, the learners’ production of their preferred forms did not show the influence of the power variable.

Insert Table 6 & 7 here

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Turning to *internal modification*, Table 8 shows that, compared with the native speakers, productions by both the Intermediate and Advanced groups were highly limited, and neither group showed a notable change over time. The learners differed from the native speakers in their choice of *internal modification* forms. The two most frequently produced forms by the learners were the politeness marker 请 (*qǐng*, please) (which was not produced by the native speakers at all) and *verb reduplication* (which was not a preferred form among the native speakers). The native speakers preferred, instead, the understater 一下 (*yīxià*, a little) and the honorific pronoun 您 (*nín*, you). The learners, however, produced these two forms to an almost negligible extent. Regarding the influence of power on the production of *internal modification*, Table 5 shows that the native speakers produced the understater 一下 (*yīxià*, a little) primarily in friend scenarios and honorific pronoun 您 (*nín*, you) exclusively for professor scenarios. As for the learners, while their production of the politeness maker 请 (*qǐng*, please) did not show clear influence of the power variable, their use of *verb reduplication* demonstrated a native-like pattern, that is, the form was produced exclusively for the “friend” scenarios.

Insert Table 8 here

The last part of the *post hoc* analysis focused on *external modification*. As Table 9 shows, regardless of proficiency levels, the learners’ production of *external modification* demonstrated a trend of development toward the native speakers’ norm. Although the learners still under-produced *external modification* even toward the end of their sojourn, the Intermediate and Advanced groups both notably increased their overall production from

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pretest to posttest. Moreover, just like the native speakers, the Intermediate and Advanced groups' most frequently produced external modifier was *grounder* (i.e., providing justifications for the intended request) and the two learner groups both continued to increase the production of this modifier over time. Finally, the pattern of situational distribution found in the learner data also resembled that of the native speakers, that is, more *grounders* were used in professor scenarios than in friend scenarios (Table 5).

Insert Table 9 here

In summary, the *post hoc* analysis showed more or less similar patterns of change for the two learner groups. The production of *alerters* demonstrated a combination of native-like change and lack of change over time for both Intermediate and Advanced groups. The production of request strategies revealed largely non-native-like change, notably illustrated by the Intermediate and Advanced groups' increased use of the two willingness/permission-query forms. Both learner groups continued to under-produce *internal modification* and little change was observed throughout their sojourn. Finally, the production of *external modification* showed a pattern of native-like change.

5.0 Discussion

This study investigated whether and how different levels of proficiency affected pragmatic development of request-making in L2 Chinese during study abroad. The results will be discussed according to the three measures of pragmatic performance, namely, appropriateness rating, planning time, and speech rate.

Regarding the measure of appropriateness rating, an indicator of pragmatic knowledge,

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the quantitative results showed that the Intermediate and Advanced groups both scored significantly higher at posttest than at pretest, and the magnitude of improvement was also comparable. In other words, a higher level of linguistic proficiency did not lead to more gain in pragmatic knowledge in a study abroad context. Results of the *post hoc* analysis further showed similar patterns of change for both learner groups regarding the production of *alerters*, *head acts* (i.e., request strategies), and *internal* and *external modification*. However, whether the observed changes represented native-like development or not varied across different components of a request sequence. Notable native-like change occurred for *external modification*, yet non-native-like change was found for request strategies. Moreover, while the production of *internal modification* primarily showed a lack of change over time, the production of *alerters* revealed a mixture of native-like development and lack of change.

How can we explain these patterns of change? In terms of request strategy, regardless of proficiency levels, the learners became increasingly reliant on conventionally indirect strategies (particularly the two willingness/permission-query forms) while their production of direct strategies remained at a very low level over time. Because many studies have documented native English speakers' overall preference for conventionally indirect strategies over direct strategies (e.g., Blum-Kulka, 1989; Hill, 1997; Trosborg, 1995), the learners' increased production of conventionally indirect strategies and their persistent underuse of direct strategies likely reflected their L1 influence. Among conventionally indirect strategies, both learner groups showed a preference for the willingness/permission-query forms at the beginning of their sojourn, and their increased production of these forms paralleled their continued underuse of the ability-query forms. These results revealed the learners' tendency

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to adhere to already established form-function-context mappings for request-making. This observation corroborated Bataller's (2010) research findings (cited earlier) showing a continued mismatch between Spanish learners and native speakers in their most frequently produced request strategies throughout the four-month study abroad period. Schauer's studies (cited earlier) also reported German learners' non-native-like choice of request strategies for high-imposition scenarios after a nine-month stay in the UK. In fact, as Taguchi (2010) observed in a comprehensive review of longitudinal research on L2 pragmatic production, L2 learners' prolonged reliance on a limited range of linguistic forms for realizing pragmatic functions is a widely observed phenomenon even in a study abroad context, although expansion of pragmalinguistic repertoire can occur after native speaker modeling and/or explicit feedback. Echoing Bataller's research findings, the one-semester sojourn in this study was probably not long enough to allow the learners to receive enough exposure and/or feedback on which pragmalinguistic form(s) to use for constructing request strategy. As a result, the learners continued to rely on the pragmalinguistic knowledge of request strategies that already existed in their mind at the beginning of the study abroad period.

Regardless of proficiency levels, the learners' use of external modification showed a trend of native-like development in terms of overall frequency of production. Particularly notable was the increased use of *grounder*, which approached native-level frequency of production by the Advanced group at posttest. The learners' preference for and their increased use of *grounder* is expected. On the one hand, *grounder* has been found to be the most frequently used external modifier regardless of L2 proficiency (e.g., Economidou-Koetsidis, 2009; Faerch & Kasper, 1989; Hassall, 2001; Woodfield & Economidou-Koetsidis, 2010).

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On the other hand, longitudinal studies have shown that *grounder* is typically acquired early on in both at-home and study abroad contexts (e.g., Ellis, 1992; Schauer, 2007, 2009; Woodfield, 2012). The results of this study further reinforced the findings of previous research by offering developmental data across two different proficiency levels in a study abroad context.

In contrast to *external modification*, the learners' production of *internal modification* remained highly limited over time. This observation echoed previous findings of longitudinal research showing slow and/or lack of changes for *internal modification* yet fast native-like development for *external modification* (e.g., Cole & Anderson, 2001; Schauer, 2004, 2006, 2007; Woodfield, 2012). Studies have also shown that internal modifiers are typically under-produced even among advance-level learners (e.g., Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2010; Hassall, 2001; Woodfield, 2008), a phenomenon that has been attributed to a relatively high level of processing capacity that the production of internal modifiers requires (e.g., Trosborg, 1995; Hassall, 2012). Nevertheless, the learners' negligible use of the understater 一丁 (yīxiǎ, a little) and the honorific pronoun 您 (nín, you) might also be due to the paucity of exposure and the characteristics of the study abroad program. As mentioned earlier, although the program is located inside a Chinese university, it caters to U.S. college students only. The students of this program attended special language classes created just for them. Hence, the learners of this study might not have received much native speaker modeling for using the understater 一丁 (yīxiǎ, a little) and the honorific pronoun 您 (nín, you). On the other hand, because almost all language instructors working for the program at the time of this study were relatively young (typically under the age of 30), and because the study abroad program

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emphasizes an egalitarian relationship between students and instructors, the learners might not feel the need to use the honorific pronoun when responding to the scenarios. This explanation, however, is very tentative and needs to be validated by future research that solicits learners' reflections on their production.

In contrast to the almost negligible production of the understater and the honorific pronoun, the learners, regardless of proficiency levels, seemed to rely primarily on the politeness maker 请 (*qǐng*, please). One possible explanation is the influence of teaching, because the word 请 (*qǐng*, please) is typically introduced early on in elementary-level Chinese textbooks (i.e., in the very first few chapters) in the format of formulaic expressions such as 请进 (*qǐng jìn*, please come in), 请坐 (*qǐng zuò*, please sit down), and 请问 (*qǐng wèn*, may I ask). The learners were thus familiar with the pragmatic function of this politeness marker before going abroad. While in China, the lack of sufficient native speaker modeling due to the special arrangement of the study abroad program (discussed above) might have further entrenched their already existing understanding of the usage of this politeness marker; consequently, little change was observed regarding the production of this *internal modification* form.

Finally, regarding the production of *alterters*, native-like development was observed for the production of *full name* (for the “friend” scenarios) and for *surname + title* (for the “professor” scenarios). However, *title/role*, a frequently produced alterter by the native speakers, never appeared in the learner data. The learners thus seemed to prefer more specific terms of address over the more general *title/role*. This probably reflected L2 learners' overall preference for more pragmatically transparent means to express themselves (e.g., Faerch &

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Kasper, 1989; Hassall, 1997).

As we can see, the production of *alerters*, request strategies, and *internal modification* typically depends on precise knowledge of pragmalinguistic forms. In contrast, *external modification* deals with rituals and tactics of request-making (e.g., providing a reason before putting forward one's request) and does not necessarily require precise knowledge of pragmalinguistic forms. The different patterns of change for *alerters*, request strategies, *internal modification* and *external modification* observed in this study echoed an observation made by Taguchi (2010) in her synthesis of longitudinal studies on L2 pragmatic production, which is that pragmatic knowledge of linguistic forms encoding pragmatic function (e.g., *internal modification*) does not develop as quickly and satisfactorily (in the sense of native-like development) as pragmatic knowledge about rituals and tactics for request-making (i.e., *external modification*). The findings of this study further indicate that a higher level of linguistic proficiency does not change such patterns of development, nor does it affect the magnitude of gain in pragmatic knowledge even in a study abroad context. Referring to the five-stage sequence of L2 request development (Kasper & Rose, 2002, p. 140), the Intermediate and Advanced groups seemed to be at both Stage Three (i.e., Unpacking, during which conventionalized forms are readily incorporated into productive use and there is an increased in producing conventionally indirect strategies) and Stage Four (i.e., Pragmatic expansion, during which one's pragmalinguistic repertoire is expanded). It remains an empirical question as to whether and when the learners of this study would reach the final stage of L2 request development, i.e., Fine-tuning (during which the relationship between linguistic forms, pragmatic functions, and applicable contexts is finely sorted out).

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Turning to the two speed measures, neither group reduced planning time during study abroad; on the other hand, the Advanced group gained in speech rate but the Intermediate group did not. As discussed earlier, the planning time measure reflects pre-task planning (Taguchi, 2007), which is primarily associated with the conceptualization stage of speech production (Yuan & Ellis, 2003). From a psycholinguistic perspective, the conceptualization stage is characterized with highly controlled processing that consumes attentional resources (Levelt, 1989). In this study, the learners responded to request-making scenarios varied in interlocutor power relationship (e.g., professor vs. friend) and size of imposition (e.g., small favor vs. big favor). Hence, they needed to retrieve sociopragmatic knowledge specifying the influence of contextual variables on request-making as well as pragmalinguistic knowledge about appropriate request-making forms (e.g., *internal modification*, forms of request strategy) and means for strategizing the intended requests (e.g., *external modification*). Because the Advanced group had a more developed level of pragmatic knowledge throughout the entire study abroad period (as reflected by the appropriate ratings), pragmatic knowledge should be more readily available for processing for the Advanced group than for the Intermediate group. As such, one can expect that the Advanced group's planning time would be shorter than that of the Intermediate group. However, the results showed that the Advanced group never outperformed the Intermediate group on this measure, nor did the two groups significantly reduced their planning time. One possible reason, as suggested by Taguchi (2007), is that while pre-task planning involves cognitive processing, non-cognitive factors such as anxiety and personality (e.g., risk-taking) also affect the amount of time needed for speech planning. In other words, the planning time measure likely reflects processing ability as well as the

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influence of non-cognitive attributes. Hence, it may not be sensitive enough to capture the gain in processing ability involved in the formulation stage of speech production. Alternative measures may need to be explored in future research.

Speech rate, the other speed measure, is considered as an indicator of online planning (Taguchi, 2007) that is primarily directed to the formulation stage of speech production (Yuan & Ellis, 2003). According to Levelt (1989), the formulation stage involves a series of grammatical and phonological encoding processes that draw on a speaker's relevant linguistic knowledge. For native speakers, these processes involve automatic processing because their linguistic knowledge is well established and because they have constantly been accessing their linguistic knowledge for communicative purposes. Yet, for L2 learners, automatic processing develops gradually through a large amount of practice for applying their already learnt linguistic knowledge to meaningful communication (DeKeyser, 2007b; Segalowitz, 2003, 2010). In the context of L2 pragmatic development, Bialystok (1993) further theorized that the development of processing ability presupposes the development of pragmatic knowledge, that is, pragmatic knowledge needs to be developed first before it can be processed. In this study, the Advanced group had received nearly twice as much formal Chinese instruction as the Intermediate group before going abroad (i.e., an average of 4.19 semesters for the Advanced group, and an average of 2.26 semesters for the Intermediate group). Consequently, the Advanced group started out with a higher level of pragmatic and linguistic knowledge than the Intermediate group. As the pretest ratings show, the Advanced group's mean rating was approaching 2.0 while the mean rating for the Intermediate group was just above 1.0. According to the scoring rubrics, this means that the Advanced group's

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level of pragmatic and linguistic (i.e., lexical and grammatical) knowledge could already enable them to somehow express the targeted requests at the beginning of their sojourn, yet the Intermediate group's level of pragmatic and linguistic knowledge could hardly do so. Hence, the Advanced group probably had already reached a threshold level of pragmatic and linguistic knowledge at the beginning of their sojourn so that they were able to take advantage of the study abroad context for developing their processing ability while continuing to develop their pragmatic knowledge. In contrast, the Intermediate group's initial pragmatic and linguistic knowledge was so limited that their primary achievement during their sojourn was to develop an adequate set of pragmatic knowledge rather than to develop their processing ability. This difference between the Intermediate and Advanced groups in their initial level of pragmatic and linguistic (i.e. lexical and grammatical) knowledge (as a result of different amount of formal Chinese instruction) might have led to the different amount of gain in speech rate.

In conclusion, the effects of different levels of linguistic proficiency (that can be achieved through the amount of formal instruction reported in this study) on request production in L2 Chinese were found to depend on specific measures of pragmatic performance. Regardless of proficiency levels, the learners made comparable gains in appropriateness rating and they showed similar patterns of change regarding the production of *alerters*, *head acts* (i.e., request strategy), and *internal* and *external modification*. For the measure of planning time, no change was observed for the two proficiency groups. For the measure of speech rate, a higher level of linguistic proficiency (i.e., achieved after about four semesters of formal Chinese instruction) resulted in gains, but a lower level of proficiency

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(i.e., achieved after about two semesters of formal instruction) did not result in such gains.

Taking the perspective of L2 pragmatic development in terms of knowledge and processing ability, it can be said that the level of linguistic proficiency (that can be achieved through the amount of formal instruction reported here) did not affect the magnitude of gain in knowledge (as indicated by appropriateness rating) in a study abroad context, yet this factor positively affected the development in processing ability involved in the formulation stage of request production. Regarding the optimal timing for going abroad, the finding of this study suggests that receiving about four semesters of formal instruction before going abroad is a more advisable choice for developing the ability to produce requests in L2 Chinese.

6.0 Limitations and Future Research

This study is limited in several aspects and future research is called for. To begin with, this study did not examine whether there were any factors mediating the effects of proficiency on pragmatic development. One such possible factor is the amount of L2 contact. A more refined study should incorporate measures of L2 contact and investigate whether and how proficiency interacts with L2 contact to influence pragmatic development during study abroad. In addition, the length of observation of this study was only one semester. While this was due to logistic constraints (i.e., the study-abroad program is designed to be a semester program), some of the interesting developmental patterns emerged from the current findings would call for a longer observation period for refined investigation. For example, given the fact that the Intermediate and Advanced groups both increased their production of non-native-like request strategy forms over time, an interesting question is whether this trend will continue or whether there is a turning point at which the learners start to employ

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native-like request strategy forms. Future studies need to incorporate a longer observation period with more data collection points to answer questions like this.

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Notes

1. According to Blum-Kulka, Hourse, and Kasper (1989, pp. 16-19), the *alter* serves the function of attention-getter (e.g., *title+surname*, such as Professor Taylor); the *head act* refers to the part of a request sequence that can realize the requesting function independent of other elements, and a typical way of analyzing the head act is to examine its level of directness, such as direct strategy (e.g., “Open the door”), conventionally indirect strategy (e.g., “Can you open the door?”), and non-conventionally indirect strategy (e.g., “It is so hot here.” which implies the speaker’s intention of asking someone to open the door); *internal modification* refers to syntactic (*tense*, such as I was wondering if you could...) and/or lexical (e.g., *politeness marker*, such as *please*) devices within the boundary of the head act that can either downgrade or upgrade the speaker’s tone; finally, *external modification* refers to the elements outside the boundary

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of the head act that can either mitigate or aggravate the speakers' tone (e.g., *grounder*, such as providing a reason for one's request).

2. One reviewer pointed out that preparing scenario descriptions in L2 (i.e., Chinese) could better orient the participating learners to the target language community. While this author agrees with the reviewer's comment, in this study the scenario descriptions were prepared in L1 (English) in order to ensure that the participating learners fully comprehended the scenarios and also to prevent them from appropriating words and phrases from the scenario descriptions. A replication study using Chinese scenario descriptions is needed to examine whether the results would remain the same or not.
3. For Tables 4, 6, 8, and 9, I calculated the means for each participant group in the following way. Using the category of *alerters* as an example, I first counted the total number of instances of a specific *alerter* form (e.g., *full name*) produced by a participant group for all eight scenarios. This number was then divided by the number of participants in that group. For Table 5 and Table 7, I calculated the means in the following way. Again using the category of *alerters* as an example, I first counted the total number of instances of a specific *alerter* form (e.g., *full name*) produced by a participant group separately in the "friend" scenarios ($k = 4$) and in the "professor" scenarios ($k = 4$). The two numbers were then separately divided by the number of participants in that group.
4. The *Ba*-structure is a unique linguistic form in modern Chinese. It typically conveys a strong sense of disposal.

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Table 1.

Participants' Background Information

	Average age (range)	Gender (male: female)	At-home formal Chinese study (range)	Ethnicity
Intermediate (<i>n</i> = 15)	20.60 years (19-25)	8:7	2.26 semesters (2-4)	Caucasian: 11 Hispanic: 1 Japanese: 1 Mixed: 2
Advanced (<i>n</i> = 16)	20.37 years (19-23)	8:8	4.19 semesters (4-6)	Caucasian: 13 Mixed: 2 Slavic: 1

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Table 2.

Scoring Rubrics for Appropriateness Rating

Rating	Description
4 Excellent	Target communicative function realized. Expressions fully appropriate for given request scenarios. No or almost no grammatical and/or lexical errors.
3 Good	Target communicative function realized. Expressions mostly appropriate for given request scenarios. Limited grammatical and/or lexical errors, yet they do not interfere with meaning/appropriateness.
2 Fair	Target communicative function somewhat realized. Expressions somewhat appropriate for given request scenarios. Notable grammatical and/or lexical errors (including code switching) that interfere with meaning and/or appropriateness.
1 Poor	Expression incomprehensible (due to serious grammatical and/or lexical error) OR Expressions totally irrelevant to given request scenarios.
0	No response

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Table 3.

Means and Standard Deviations of the Three Outcome Measures

		Rating		Planning time		Speech rate	
		Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Intermediate (<i>n</i> = 15)	Mean	1.13	1.85	1.89	1.74	101.98	104.39
	SD	0.46	0.44	0.98	0.61	37.70	41.37
Advanced (<i>n</i> = 16)	Mean	1.94	2.38	1.76	1.40	133.58	167.20
	SD	0.42	0.43	0.78	0.67	38.86	36.34

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Table 4.

Mean Number of Alerter Produced by Learners and Native Speakers

	NS (n = 22)	IN pre (n = 15)	IN post (n = 15)	AD pre (n = 16)	AD post (n = 16)
<i>Surname + title</i>	2.50	0.67	1.69	2.60	2.13
<i>Full name</i>	1.95	0.40	1.44	0.73	1.25
<i>Attention getter</i>					
喂/嘿 wèi /hei Hey	0.09	0.00	0.00	0.07	0.00
哎/啊 āi /ā Oh	0.32	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.19
对不起 duìbuqǐ Excuse me	0.00	0.27	0.19	0.67	0.31
请问 qǐngwèn May I ask	0.00	0.87	0.25	0.60	0.19
<i>Title/role</i>	1.23	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
<i>Familiar/Casual terms</i>					
哥们儿 gēmenr Brother	0.14	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
<i>Greetings</i>					
老师好 lǎoshī hǎo Hello, Teacher	0.05	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
您好 nínǎo Hello (with horrific you)	0.05	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
你好 nǐhǎo Hello	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.32
Total	6.33	2.21	3.57	4.67	4.39

Note. IN: intermediate group; AD: advanced group; NS: native speaker group.

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Table 5.

Mean Number of the Most Frequent Alerters, Internal and External Modification Produced by Native Speakers and Learners for the “Friend” (=P) and “Professor” Scenarios (+P)

	Native group (<i>n</i> = 22)		Intermediate group (<i>n</i> = 15)				Advanced group (<i>n</i> = 16)			
			Pretest		Posttest		Pretest		Posttest	
	=P	+P	=P	+P	=P	+P	=P	+P	=P	+P
<i>Alerter</i>										
<i>Surname + title</i>	0.00	2.50	0.00	0.67	0.00	1.69	0.00	2.60	0.00	2.13
<i>Full name</i>	1.95	0.00	0.40	0.00	1.44	0.00	0.73	0.00	1.25	0.00
<i>Title/role</i>	0.00	1.23	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
<i>对不起 duìbuqǐ Excuse me</i>	0.00	0.00	0.07	0.20	0.00	0.19	0.20	0.47	0.00	0.31
<i>请问 qǐngwèn May I ask</i>	0.00	0.00	0.67	0.20	0.19	0.06	0.33	0.27	0.13	0.06
<i>Internal modification</i>										
<i>Verb reduplication</i>	0.41	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.27	0.00	0.25	0.00	0.32	0.00
<i>请 qǐng Please</i>	0.00	0.00	0.20	0.13	0.20	0.13	0.31	0.25	0.31	0.12
<i>一下 yíxià A little</i>	2.04	0.60	0.07	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.06	0.00	0.13	0.00
<i>您 nín You</i>	0.00	1.41	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.07	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
<i>External Modification</i>										
<i>Grounder</i>	1.45	3.36	0.27	0.27	0.87	1.40	0.69	2.00	1.25	2.93

Note. =P refers to the four friend-minor request scenarios, +P refers to the four professor-major request scenarios.

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Table 6.

Mean Number of Request Strategies Produced by Learners and Native Speakers

	NS (<i>n</i> = 22)	IN pre (<i>n</i> = 15)	IN post (<i>n</i> = 15)	AD pre (<i>n</i> = 16)	AD post (<i>n</i> = 16)
Direct strategies					
Imperatives (non- <i>Ba</i> -structure)	1.41	0.33	0.53	0.75	0.44
Imperatives (<i>Ba</i> -structure)	1.41	0.00	0.20	0.06	0.06
Presumptive statement	0.09	0.13	0.00	0.00	0.00
Want statement	0.27	0.27	0.13	0.31	0.19
Direct question	0.32	0.33	0.07	0.25	0.13
Conventionally indirect strategies					
能...吗? / 能不能...? <i>Néng ...ma? / Néngbùnéng ...?</i> Can...? / Can or cannot...?	4.09	0.07	0.33	0.31	0.38
可以...吗? / 可(以)不可以...? <i>Kěyǐ ... ma? / Kě(yǐ)bù kěyǐ ...?</i> Would/may ...? / Would (may) or would (may) not...?	0.41	1.93	4.67	4.38	5.93
...怎么样? ... zěnmeyàng? How about ...?	0.00	0.13	0.13	0.00	0.00
Non-conventionally indirect strategies					
Stating situations only	0.00	0.20	0.27	0.56	0.19

Note. IN: intermediate group; AD: advanced group; NS: native speaker group.

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Table 7

Mean Number of the Most Frequent Head Act Forms Produced by Native Speakers and Learners for the “Friend” (=P) and “Professor” Scenarios (+P)

	Native group (<i>n</i> = 22)		Intermediate group (<i>n</i> = 15)				Advanced group (<i>n</i> = 16)			
			Pretest		Posttest		Pretest		Posttest	
	=P	+P	=P	+P	=P	+P	=P	+P	=P	+P
Imperatives (non- <i>Ba</i> -structure)	1.10	0.32	0.20	0.13	0.34	0.20	0.51	0.25	0.31	0.12
Imperatives (<i>Ba</i> -structure)	1.32	0.09	0.00	0.00	0.20	0.00	0.06	0.00	0.06	0.00
能...吗? / 能不能...? <i>Néng ...ma? / Néng bù néng ...?</i> Can...? / Can or cannot...?	1.14	2.96	0.07	0.00	0.20	0.14	0.25	0.12	0.26	0.06
可以...吗? / 可(以)不可以...? <i>Kě yǐ ... ma? / Kě (yǐ) bù kě yǐ ...?</i> Would (may) ...? / Would (may) or Would (may) not...?	0.23	0.19	1.20	0.73	2.33	2.33	2.19	2.19	2.82	3.13

Note. =P refers to the four friend-minor request scenarios, +P refers to the four professor-major request scenarios.

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Table 8.

Mean Number of Internal Modification Produced by Learners and Native Speakers

	NS (<i>n</i> = 22)	IN pre (<i>n</i> = 15)	IN post (<i>n</i> = 15)	AD pre (<i>n</i> = 16)	AD post (<i>n</i> = 16)
Verb reduplication	0.41	0.00	0.27	0.25	0.32
Politeness marker					
请 <i>qǐng</i> Please	0.00	0.33	0.33	0.56	0.43
麻烦 <i>máfan</i> Trouble	0.05	0.00	0.00	0.06	0.00
Understater					
一下 <i>yíxià</i> A little	2.64	0.07	0.00	0.06	0.13
一会 <i>yíhuì</i> A while	0.05	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
一眼 <i>yíyǎn</i> One look	0.05	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
一点 <i>yí diǎn</i> A bit	0.14	0.00	0.00	0.06	0.00
Downtoner					
吧 <i>ba</i> Sentence final particle	0.64	0.07	0.07	0.00	0.00
Appealer					
可以吗? <i>kěyǐ ma?</i> OK?	0.23	0.21	0.07	0.00	0.26
好吗? / 好不好? <i>hǎo ma ? / hǎo bu hǎo ?</i> Ok? / Ok or not OK?	0.09	0.07	0.07	0.19	0.12
行不行? / 行吗? <i>xíng buxíng? / xíng ma?</i> OK? / OK or not OK?	0.46	0.07	0.00	0.00	0.00
Honorific					
您 <i>nín</i> You	1.41	0.00	0.07	0.00	0.00
Consultative device					
您看 <i>nín kàn</i> You see	0.37	0.13	0.00	0.00	0.00
Total	6.54	0.95	0.88	1.18	1.26

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Table 9.

Mean Number of External Modification Produced by Learners and Native Speakers

	NS (<i>n</i> = 22)	IN pre (<i>n</i> = 15)	IN post (<i>n</i> = 15)	AD pre (<i>n</i> = 16)	AD post (<i>n</i> = 16)
<i>Preparator</i>	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.07	0.91
<i>Grounder</i>	0.53	2.27	2.69	4.19	4.82
<i>Sweetener</i>	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.13	0.14
<i>Cost minimizing</i>	0.20	0.27	0.38	0.63	0.73
<i>Promise of reward</i>	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.18
<i>Promise</i>	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.18
<i>Threat</i>	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.06	0.00
<i>Direct appeal</i>	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.06	0.23
<i>Moralizing statement</i>	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.05
<i>Apologizing</i>	0.40	0.27	0.38	0.44	0.77
<i>Self criticism</i>	0.07	0.07	0.00	0.00	0.09
<i>Thanking</i>	0.00	0.40	0.07	0.25	0.59
<i>Offering alternative</i>	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.06	0.18
<i>Disarmer</i>	0.00	0.00	0.07	0.06	0.32
Total	1.20	3.28	3.59	5.95	9.19

Note. IN: intermediate group; AD: advanced group; NS: native speaker group.

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Appendix One

Request scenarios

1. During a class break, you want to borrow and read your friend's newspaper. The newspaper is on the desk.
2. The mid-term exam will be held in two days. You want to borrow and study your friend's notes for one day and give it back the next day. Your friend will also need the notes to prepare for the exam.
3. In the classroom, you feel a bit hot. So you want to ask your friend, who is sitting next to the window, to help open the window.
4. Your brother is coming to Beijing to visit you today. You cannot meet your brother at the airport because you got something really urgent to do today. So you want to ask your friend to meet your brother at the airport.
5. You cannot attend the mid-term exam tomorrow for Professor Song's course because you have got something really important to do. You want to ask Professor Song to let you take the exam one day later.
6. You are discussing some questions with Professor Liu. You want to borrow a pencil from Professor Liu so as to take down what you are talking about.
7. A paper is due today but you haven't finished it yet due to illness. So you want to ask Professor Wang to extend the due date for you.
8. Professor Chen said that he had sent the individualized assignments to each student's e-mail account. But you haven't received your e-mail and therefore want to ask Professor Chen to re-send it to you.