ELSEVIER

'You could win Masterchef with this soup. Can I get some more?' Request production and the impact of instruction on young EFL learners

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

This paper presents a study exploring the impact of concept-based instruction of requests with two intact classes of young learners of English (aged 12—13) in a Norwegian primary school. Based on sociocultural theory, the instruction aimed to promote agentive language use by focusing on two main dimensions: firstly, introducing scientific concepts and language resources related to the pragmalinguistic dimension, i.e. internal and external modification strategies to increase the learners' pragmalinguistic repertoire; secondly, presenting the sociopragmatic dimension, such as the situation, familiarity, and interlocutor age. In this study, learners' internalisation of pragmalinguistic resources, displayed through increased variation in language use, is viewed as a prerequisite for agency. The learners' request production was tested through a video-prompted oral discourse completion test (VODCT) in a pre-, post- and delayed post-test. The results reveal an increased variation and use of modal verbs and supportive moves following the instruction. In addition, their distribution varied depending on the interlocutor's age and familiarity. The learners also started using downgraders introduced during instruction. However, except for *please,* downgraders were not commonly used, which suggests that these require further scholarly attention. Overall, the young learners' pragmalinguistic development displayed in the present study reveals a potential for teaching pragmatics through concept-based approaches.

1. Introduction

Since Kasper's (1997) call for more research within the field of interlanguage pragmatics (ILP), there has been much theoretical discussion and empirical research into the teachability and learnability of pragmatics (van Compernolle, 2014). However, few studies have involved younger language learners (Plonsky and Zhuang, 2019; Schauer, 2019), here defined as those aged 5 to 13, which reflects the European primary level of education (Drew and Hasselgreen, 2008). Although Bardovi-Harlig and Mahan-Taylor (2003) called for early attention to pragmatics, the paucity of research with these age groups leaves knowledge gaps when it comes to its teachability. Moreover, the question about how pragmatics should be taught with these learners remains inconclusive (Ishihara, 2010). This is the background from which this study departs: it focuses on

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investigating the teachability of requests with learners aged 12–13 in a Norwegian primary school, specifically by employing sociocultural theory (SCT) as a pedagogical framework.

The majority of investigations within ILP have focused on the effectiveness of implicit versus explicit input, with meta-analyses pointing to explicit instruction as more effective (Plonsky and Zhuang, 2019; Taguchi, 2015). Deriving from cognitive theories of SLA (Ohta, 2005), ILP instruction has been criticised for underplaying the negotiations of meaning in communication (Liddicoat and McConachy, 2019). In ILP, the core of explicit input has been to provide learners with meta-pragmatic explanations (Kasper, 2001), but as Taguchi (2015:17) argues, this distinction is somewhat opaque and tends to be less dichotomous, where "explicit treatments often involve more than just metapragmatic explanation, and include implicit activities". Moreover, providing learners with metapragmatic explanations is in itself ambiguous as the operationalisations of 'metapragmatic explanations' are somewhat inconsistent, e.g. mappings of forms and their appropriateness in specific contexts as opposed to reflections about language use (McConachy, 2013), and often not clearly defined (Buson and Billiez, 2013; Nikula, 2002). Consequently, in many studies (e.g. Alcón Soler, 2005; Ghobadi and Fahim, 2009; Halenko and Jones, 2011) metapragmatic explanations involved teaching specific language forms for usage in certain contexts or treating language forms as inherently polite. This notion of teaching pragmatic rules of thumb (e.g. Liddicoat and McConachy, 2019; Nicholas, 2015; van Compernolle, 2014; van Compernolle et al., 2016), i.e. what to say and to whom (Liddicoat and McConachy, 2019), with specific linguistic resources being treated as more polite forms, may ultimately have limited use in communication as it suggests intralinguistic homogeneity and disregards the multiplicity of contexts learners are likely to encounter.

With these issues in mind, the current study was informed by SCT, more specifically concept-based instruction, i.e. constructing meaning through conceptual categories (Williams et al., 2013), to teach requests in English as a foreign language (EFL). A concept-based approach partially aligns with the view that explicit input is conducive to pragmatics learning, but places emphasis on pragmatics as mediated action and developing learner agency (Morollón Martí, 2021; van Compernolle, 2018; van Compernolle et al., 2016), with agency being viewed as "the socioculturally mediated capacity to act and to assign meaning to one's actions" (van Compernolle, 2014:21). This means that rather than aiming to teach adherence to social conventions (rules of thumb), the instruction aims to provide learners with conscious control over their choices. This control includes an "ability to break with pragmalinguistic and/or sociopragmatic conventions in order to achieve a desired effect in light of present circumstances, constraints, and potential conflicts and/or points of tension" (van Compernolle, 2014:42). Thus, adhering to the view that social action is mediated by pragmalinguistics, which is again mediated by sociopragmatics (van Compernolle, 2014), SCT-informed concept-based approaches embrace a dynamic view of teaching overarching concepts related to the pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic dimensions (Morollón Martí, 2021; Nicholas, 2015). In other words, concepts related to pragmalinguistic and/or sociopragmatic dimensions serve as an orienting basis for making choices in communication. Furthermore, in order to develop agency, the learners' own interpretations of language use and meta-pragmatic awareness, i.e. their "ability to verbalize reflections on linguistic forms, contextual features and/or their interplay" (Myrset and Savić, 2021:165), are foregrounded as serving a vital mediating role. Thus, SCT-informed pragmatics instruction aims to teach pragmatics by fostering the learners' conceptual understandings and their metapragmatic awareness, which together facilitate the choices that the learners make in communication, that is, agentive language use (Liddicoat and McConachy, 2019; Myrset, 2021; van Compernolle, 2014).

By employing a concept-based approach, this study provides evidence from SCT-informed pragmatics instruction with young learners, thus supplementing previous investigations which have focused on adults (e.g. Nicholas, 2015; van Compernolle, 2014). Adopting a view of pragmatics as mediated action, that is, social action being informed by pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic dimensions, prior studies have primarily introduced learners to scientific concepts related to sociopragmatics. Thus, inherent in these studies is a view that the learners already have access to the pragmalinguistic resources, for instance, the use of the French pronouns *tu* and *vous* (e.g. Henery, 2015; van Compernolle, 2014). However, considering that "concepts to be taught should be chosen with the age and educational background of the learners in mind" (Nicholas, 2015:391), the current study took a somewhat different point of departure compared to studies with adults. It first focused on pragmalinguistics, i.e. "the patterns of language used to accomplish pragmatic goals", followed by introducing sociopragmatics, i.e. "the sociological factors and cultural meanings" (van Compernolle, 2018:211); thus, the current study is different from van Compernolle (2018:224), who suggests that "pragmalinguistics is not itself the primary focus of instruction but it is instead the means by which sociopragmatics can be taught". However, for learners to become agentive language users, they must arguably have such linguistic resources at hand, thus a broader pragmalinguistic repertoire becomes a prerequisite for agency.

While a previous study from the project presented herein (Myrset, 2021) found that the learners externalised their conceptual knowledge when expressing their metapragmatic understandings in group interviews, the focus in this paper is mainly on the pragmalinguistic development evidenced through a concept-based approach to teaching second or foreign language (L2) requests. Thus, the present study explores the learners' development through the degree to which they increased their pragmalinguistic repertoire (request forms) following the instruction and the extent to which they varied their repertoire based on sociopragmatic variables (contextual variables in the tests). The results presented are requests elicited through a pre-post-delayed design aiming to address the following research questions:

To what extent does concept-based instruction of L2 requests with young learners influence their functional pragma-linguistic development through

1 the learners' pragmalinguistic repertoire of head acts, and internal and external modification strategies?
2 the learners' pragmalinguistic variation depending on the sociopragmatic variables of familiarity and age of the interlocutor?

2. Literature review

2.1. Request strategies

Acquired early in a child's L1 development (Cekaite, 2013; Zufferey, 2014) and commonly used in communication (Stavans and Shafran, 2018), requests were considered an appropriate target for L2 pragmatics instruction with 7th graders (aged 12–13). Requests can be realised through various strategies, starting from the head act, i.e. "the minimal unit which can realize a request" (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989:275), which can fall into three levels of directness according to "the degree to which the speaker's illocutionary intent is apparent from the locution" (p. 278): direct, conventionally indirect, and non-conventionally indirect (hints).[1] Requests can be modified internally or externally to soften or increase the requestive force. One such internal modifier is lexical downgraders, which are "optional additions to soften the impositive force […] through specific lexical or phrasal choices" (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989:283), more specifically downtoners, such as *possibly/perhaps*, and the marker *please*. In addition, syntactic modification is achieved through optional syntactic devices that mitigate the requestive force and modal verbs, which "feature significantly in requestive behaviour" (p. 289). Alerters, i.e. elements to get the hearer's attention, such as titles/roles (e.g. *teacher* or *Mrs*) and attention getters (e.g. *excuse me),* and supportive moves modify the request externally. Supportive moves precede or follow the head act and include preparators, i.e. "asking about the potential availability of the hearer"; grounders, i.e. providing "reasons, explanations, or justifications for his or her request"; sweeteners, i.e. "appreciation of the hearer's ability" (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain, 1984:205); and promise of reward, i.e. announcing "a reward due on fulfillment of the request" (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989:288). These strategies were in focus for the current study.

2.2. English requests in the Norwegian context

Research on EFL pragmatics instruction in Norway is, to the best of the author's knowledge, non-existent. However, some cross-sectional studies have investigated young Norwegian EFL learners' pragmatic development (Savić, 2015; Savić et al., 2021) and metapragmatic awareness (Savić and Myrset, 2021; Savić & Myrset, In press). These may thus provide insights into the context of the current study and the selection of the instructional targets.

Using role plays, Savić (2015) investigated the request development of young language learners in 2nd, 4th and 6th grade (aged roughly 8, 10, and 12). Conventionally indirect requests comprised 68.8% of all the requests, with as many as 89.3% in 6th grade, and the vast majority of these included the modal verb *can*[2]. In 6th grade, supportive moves were employed in 21.1% of the requests, all of which were grounders. In her study, Savić (2015) identified pragmalinguistic development, with learners capable of producing L2 requests at an increasing level of sophistication, albeit still resorting to a limited variety of strategies. However, pragmalinguistic development was not accompanied by sociopragmatic development. Consequently, Savić (2015:465) argues that "learners do not appear to acquire all the aspects of pragmatic competence through the amount and types of exposure to English" that they receive, calling for more pragmatics instruction in Norwegian classrooms. Similarly, Savić et al. (2021) compared request development in young Greek Cypriot and Norwegian learners of English, with learners aged roughly 9, 11, and 13, through a video-prompted oral DCT (VODCT). The study revealed that Norwegian learners in 7th grade (roughly aged 13) largely resorted to conventionally indirect requests, with the majority of the requests (89.7%) including the modal *can,* whilst *could, may*, and *would* occurred much less frequently (1.5%, 2.9%, and 4.4% respectively). With regard to lexical downgraders, which were absent in the majority of requests (62.2%), *please* was the most frequently used. Finally, supportive moves appeared in 19.8% of the requests produced by the 7th-graders, of which nearly half were grounders or sweeteners (respectively in 9.9% and 7% of the requests).

In a cross-sectional study across 3rd, 5th, and 7th grade (aged roughly 9, 11, and 13), Savić & Myrset (In press) investigated learners' metapragmatic awareness in the L2, specifically related to requestive behaviour. A VODCT was first employed to elicit requests, followed by a task where the learners appraised a selection of these requests and reflected on their appraisals. Learners in all age groups produced requests of all three directness levels, with the majority being conventionally indirect. However, although produced in the VODCT, hints seemed to be the most difficult to discuss in relation to their appropriateness and communicative function. This is similar to the development of young learners in L1 (Bernicot et al., 2007), with non-literal forms occurring later in children's language development (Cekaite, 2013). Furthermore, in a study exploring the interpretative frames that the same group of learners employed in metapragmatic group discussions, Savić and Myrset (2021) found that the learners used perspectives such as historical and cultural knowledge, their own and others' perceived feelings, and cultural assumptions, as well as their L1 as a frame of reference, to make sense of request-related pragmatic practices in English. Moreover, they found that the learners assigned positive evaluations to English and its speakers. This positive attitude, the authors argue, provides a useful point of departure for instruction.

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[1] See Blum-Kulka et al. (1989:278–281) for further sub-categorisations of directness.
[2] Requests phrased as 'can I/you + VP' are similar to the Norwegian 'kan du/jeg + VP', which is a common form of requesting (Fretheim, 2005). However, due to the orthographic and phonetic similarities between *can* and *kan*, these may serve as false friends for Norwegian learners of English (Thomson, 2018).

With the previous studies in mind, there is potential for increasing young learners' pragmalinguistic repertoire. Moreover, evidence from studies on young learners' metapragmatic awareness shows that they are capable of using both knowledge about target language behaviours and their L1 experiences for metapragmatic reflections. However, whereas previous studies call for pragmatics instruction in the Norwegian context, this potential has remained untapped.

2.3. Pragmatics instruction with young learners

Turning to instruction studies, the majority focus on adult learners, whilst "[r]elatively little is known about learners at younger ages" (Plonsky and Zhuang, 2019:305). The paucity of studies with young learners could derive from an assumption that YLLs' mastery of the L2 is insufficient and that pragmatics is "simply an area to be fine-tuned once the learners' proficiency has reached an intermediate or advanced level" (Ishihara, 2013:136). However, there is reason to believe that pragmatics is taught to some extent, implicitly or explicitly, at the primary level, based on findings from cross-sectional studies on children's L2 pragmatic development (e.g. Savić, 2015), and on the input they receive in classroom communication and textbooks (Ellis, 1992; Schauer, 2019).

In the case of EFL requests, studies have explored the effects of teaching requests to young language learners through robot-assisted language learning (discovery learning) (Alemi and Haeri, 2020) and explicit input (Taguchi and Kim, 2016). These studies indicate that pragmatics is indeed teachable with learners as young as 3–6 (Alemi and Haeri, 2020), with some longer-term retention of pragmalinguistic resources (i.e. preparators) even after short periods (90 min) of instruction (Taguchi and Kim, 2016). Nevertheless, the sparse research on young learners more generally has resulted in limited insights regarding the affordances of SCT-informed pragmatics instruction with young learners. Considering that the classroom provides an environment that facilitates development mediated by peers and the teacher, and that "there is no one-to-one correspondence between form and meaning", SCT-informed instruction has potential with young language learners (Eun and Lim, 2009:19). However, this potential has remained largely unexplored, with only two studies drawing on SCT with young learners prior to the current project, to the best of the author's knowledge.

Exploring the teachability of formality and politeness with regard to EFL requests and pragmatic routines, Ishihara (2013) and Ishihara and Chiba (2014) investigated smaller groups of Japanese learners,[3] aged 7–12. The studies used dialogic instruction and collaboration with peers, in which the authors draw close links to SCT. Whereas the two studies were based on the same teaching principles and tailored to their contexts, the outcomes seem to diverge. Ishihara (2013) reports that although the 9-year-old learners' in-class (meta)pragmatic discussions seemed to become more nuanced, for production tasks they relied on external teacher scaffolding. Meanwhile, Ishihara and Chiba (2014:15) found that the oldest learners (aged 12) varied between the pragmatic targets ("Can you pass the X, please?; Could you pass the X, please?; Can I have the X, please?; and May I have the X, please?") in written DCTs, thus revealing that they had mastered the forms. Moreover, the oldest learners displayed a sociopragmatic understanding of the context through a student-generated visual DCT, which involved making a request and drawing the scenario. Whereas the learners relied on teacher scaffolding to access the pragmatic target, Ishihara and Chiba's (2014) findings suggest that learners in these age groups are able to acquire target forms and that instruction may enhance their attention towards sociopragmatic features. However, the instruction was still limited to forms that "would typically be perceived as socially-preferred mitigated requests" (Ishihara and Chiba, 2014:18), and focused on pragmatic behaviours as inherently polite, which may have been the result of the age and proficiency of the learners.

In sum, previous studies with young learners suggest a potential for early L2 pragmatics instruction, even with learners as young as 3–6 (Alemi and Haeri, 2020). Studies have investigated how peer collaboration and teacher scaffolding may facilitate the mastery of target forms and draw the learners' attention to sociopragmatic features of requesting. The production data in the aforementioned studies were mainly elicited through written DCTs. However, the results are somewhat inconclusive in terms of the impact on learner production, due to small groups of learners and a limited number of studies. The instructional approaches appear to be closely linked to the implicit-explicit paradigm, either through explicit input (Taguchi and Kim, 2016), or through tightly controlled target language forms regarded as inherently polite (Ishihara, 2013; Ishihara and Chiba, 2014). As previous studies with young language learners have not employed concept-based instruction, the current study provides new insights into this under-researched group of learners by investigating the teachability of pragmatics guided by SCT.

2.4. Sociocultural theory and pragmatics instruction

Based on Vygotsky's work (e.g. Vygotsky, 1978; Vygotsky, 2012/1934), SCT views learner development as a dialectic between biological and social conditions (Lantolf and Poehner, 2014), where learning is mediated through interaction with the learners' surroundings. The teacher plays a vital role as mediator in the learner's development, which occurs in a zone of proximal development (ZPD), i.e. "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and […] under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978:86). The

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[3] Whereas these studies were holistic investigations of instruction and teacher assessment, they report on learner-generated data from the studies and are thus included here.

language classroom, such as in the current study, thus serves as a dynamic opportunity for pragmatic development where learners collaboratively engage in activities and discussions departing from their individual lived experiences. These experiences provide a springboard for developing conceptual knowledge, more specifically, forging a unity between what Vygotsky (2012/1934) referred to as spontaneous (everyday) and scientific concepts, while formal learning, that is, schooling, is considered crucial for development of scientific knowledge (Gal'perin, 1992; Kozulin, 2018). Whereas spontaneous concepts are empirical and acquired through everyday experiences, scientific concepts are acquired through systematic attention, e.g. schooling, and their strength lies in the capacity to elevate conceptual knowledge to a generalisable and abstract realm, serving as support for learner reflections (Vygotsky, 2012/1934). Although spontaneous and scientific concepts have different developmental trajectories, their processes are interrelated and provide a dialectic for development (Vygotsky, 2012/1934). In L2 development, scientific concepts play a vital role in a "process that is conscious and deliberate from the start" (Vygotsky, 2012/1934:206). In other words, the L1 is acquired empirically through spontaneous interaction, whereas the L2 is developed in a systematic environment. This extends to pragmatics and speech acts, with which learners have their empirical L1 experiences whilst the L2 instruction provides the nuances and tools needed for reflection and agency in the target language. Scientific concepts may thus facilitate the learners' metapragmatic awareness and agency in their L2.

Within L2 instructional pragmatics, concept-based approaches have gained traction (Morollón Martí, 2021), with a growing number of instructional studies in university contexts (e.g. Henery, 2015; Nicholas, 2015; van Compernolle, 2014; van Compernolle et al., 2016). For instance, Nicholas (2015) focused on English speech acts, e.g. opening, request and closing, and their development in conversations, in an international communication programme with six university students. Through introducing concepts such as power, social distance, and imposition, the aim was to raise awareness of the interplay between the context and language. Moreover, the learners were provided with tasks where they explained, drew models of, and reflected about the concepts introduced. The study revealed positive outcomes as the learners' visual models and their explanations became increasingly more sophisticated and nuanced during the intervention. Moreover, the learners felt that their L2 request proficiency and confidence improved. However, two of the learners also reported that the instruction slowed them down in communication because of overthinking.

van Compernolle (2014, 2018), who has been highly critical of teaching rules of thumb, introduced concept-based pragmatics instruction (CBPI) to teach sociopragmatics with university students. His studies focused on sociopragmatic concepts of self-presentation, social distance, and power in order to promote agency. These concepts were introduced in relation to second person address systems in French (tu/vous) (van Compernolle, 2014), and later adapted for Spanish (tú/usted) (van Compernolle et al., 2016). In addition, van Compernolle's CBPI has been replicated by Henery (2015). In these studies, scientific concepts, e.g. 'T-shirt and jeans' and 'suit and tie' as concepts for self-representation, were used as tools for facilitating (meta)pragmatic development. The studies revealed that the instruction facilitated the internalisation of the concepts, with the learners being able to readily externalise in their meaning-making about language choices in various social situations. Thus, the instruction provided the learners with a foundation for sociopragmatic development. This supports Vygotsky's (2012/1934) argument that scientific concepts provide tools for abstraction and generalisation, thus generating more sophisticated reflections transferable to any context. In essence, CBPI enabled the learners to externalise conceptual understanding when providing their reasonings, suggesting that CBPI provides a foundation for agentive language use.

Two main features distinguish the current study from the aforementioned studies within SCT: Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, whereas the previous studies have used concept-based approaches with (young) adult learners, the current study focuses on its application with young language learners (aged 12–13). Thus, the present study aligns with the overarching principles of previous concept-based approaches − explicit instruction of scientific concepts, avoiding the teaching of rules of thumb, reflection as an important tool for development, metapragmatic awareness as a vital mediating tool for making choices, and fostering agency (e.g. Morollón Martí, 2021; Nicholas, 2015; van Compernolle, 2014) − but focused first on the pragmalinguistic rather than the sociopragmatic dimension. Secondly, although some studies have included intact classes (e.g. van Compernolle et al., 2016), previous research has mainly investigated instruction and mediation in relation to one-on-one interactions with the researcher (e.g. van Compernolle, 2014) or smaller groups of learners (n = 6) (e.g. Nicholas, 2015). The current study investigated the impact of instruction with two intact classes (n = 51). Consequently, this study contributes to investigating pragmatics instruction through SCT by providing evidence from intact classes of young language learners, and ultimately to the generally sparse research on pragmatics instruction with this age group.

3. Methods

This case study investigates the impact of pragmatics instruction with young EFL learners in a Norwegian primary school, specifically teaching requests to 7th-graders (aged 12–13) mediated by scientific concepts. The treatment was given to two intact classes in a mainstream state primary school and focused on the pragmalinguistics of requesting followed by the sociopragmatic dimension. The aim of the concept-based instruction was to promote agentive language use, thus enabling learners to reflect and make informed choices. The instruction lasted for four weeks. Data was collected before and after the instruction, with the fieldwork lasting for approximately three months (see Fig. 1). This section presents the pedagogical and methodological considerations, and the procedures followed in the study.
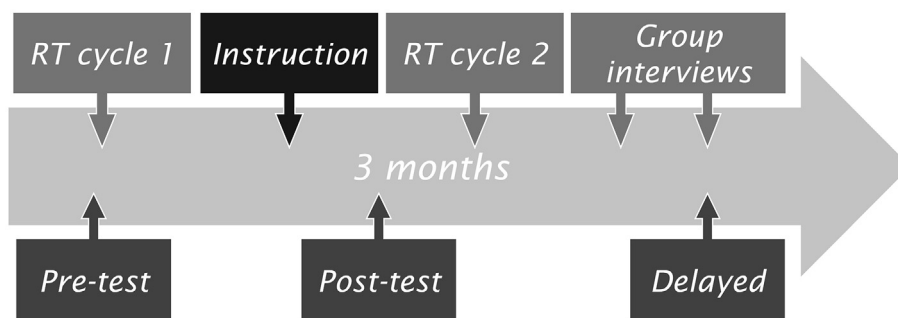
Fig. 1. An overview of the study (also presented in Myrset, 2021). The data presented in this study were generated in the pre-, post-, and delayed post-test. For an account of the cycles of Readers Theatre (RT), a dramatic group reading aloud activity (see Myrset and Savić, 2021).

3.1. Participants and sampling

7th grade was considered optimal for the treatment: Firstly, English has been a compulsory subject from 1st grade (age 6) since 1997; thus, these learners had been taught English for six years prior to the instruction. Secondly, most learners of English in 7th grade are within the range of A2-B1 in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Hasselgreen, 2005) and Norwegian learners of English are currently ranked fifth on the English Proficiency Index (Education First, 2020). 7th-graders were thus considered to be at an appropriate proficiency level for the treatment. Finally, 7th grade is the last year of primary school, and the learners would thus be organised in groups where they knew each other. To gain access to participants within this grade, the researcher used his affiliated network, or homogenous convenience sampling. Although not ideal, a convenience sample was considered optimal since the project required long-term teacher and learner participation, and considerable class time for both the instruction and the data collection, as presented in Fig. 1.

The sampling resulted in access to two intact classes (51 learners: 26 girls, 25 boys, aged 12–13), who participated as part of their regular English lessons.[4] Of these, 46 learners (23 boys, 23 girls) generated the data for the project. The remaining five were excluded for the following reasons: Firstly, one learner did not consent to participating, but still attended the classes. The remaining 50 learners were organised in 12 friendship groups of 4–5 learners (Pinter and Zandian, 2014), thus empowering them with a familiar setting (Myrset and Savić, 2021). Secondly, since one learner had lived in an English-speaking country, their group (two boys and two girls) served as a pilot group during the project. Thus, 11 groups of learners generated the data used for analysis. The project was approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data following GDPR guidelines, and active parental consent was acquired. In addition, the learners' understandings of the project (e.g. the researcher's role and the learners' involvement) were revisited for the duration of data collection to ensure that they were fully informed.

3.2. Instructional setting

The instructional setting influenced the choice of the teaching methods and the duration, which is subject to compromise in most studies (Bardovi-Harlig, 2015). The researcher was provided with access to two intact classes, so the instruction was restricted to scheduled English lessons (three per week). In order not to interfere with the overall subject progression, the researcher was allotted one third of the class time, and the treatment was distributed into two 15-min and one 30-min sessions per week (four weeks, 4 h in total). The study thus falls between "very short", i.e. a total of 1–2 h, and "short", i.e. full classes for 2–4 weeks, and was considered an "ecologically realistic one for the instructional setting" (Bardovi-Harlig, 2015:146).

3.3. Instruction

Informed by SCT and concept-based approaches, the instruction lasted for four weeks (4 h total). To promote agency, the instruction had the following aims: 1) introduce the pragmalinguistic dimension, i.e. head act directness levels, and internal and external modification strategies, through scientific concepts; 2) raise awareness of how the sociopragmatic dimension may influence request choices; 3) raise awareness of individual differences in perceptions of appropriateness. While English was the primary language for instruction, Norwegian served to facilitate meaning-making if the learners had difficulties understanding or expressing their thoughts. In addition, Savić & Myrset (In press) found that learners from similar contexts and age employed L1 lived experiences as a frame of reference when making sense of L2 pragmatics. The learners' L1 was consequently used in this study to support reflections and to connect concepts with meaning. In other words, rather than

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[4] The cut-off was set at 75% attendance (Bardovi-Harlig, 2015), which all the learners exceeded.

treating the two languages as dichotomous, knowledge of the two languages worked in unison for development (Vygotsky, 2012/1934) and the learners' L1 served as a scaffold to make sense of L2 (meta)pragmatic phenomena (Chavarría and Bonany, 2006; Eun and Lim, 2009; McConachy, 2018).

The instruction was divided into two overarching themes: pragmalinguistics (language resources) and sociopragmatics (contextual features). During the first two weeks the researcher used a concept-based approach to focus on pragmalinguistic strategies (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). The concepts were adapted for the learners' level (see Table 1) and served as a scaffold for their understanding. The instruction aimed to combine conceptual knowledge with action (Lantolf and Poehner, 2014; van Compernolle, 2014). In other words, the instruction focused on the scientific concept (e.g. direct request, see Fig. 2), then introduced some of its pragmalinguistic resources (e.g. 'Give me a pencil.'), rather than assigning language forms to specific contexts. Thus, rather than providing prescriptive rules of thumb (Liddicoat and McConachy, 2019; Nicholas, 2015; van Compernolle, 2014; van Compernolle et al., 2016), the instruction aimed to introduce pragmalinguistic resources by developing the learners' conceptual knowledge, which would serve as a tool for reflection (see also Myrset, 2021). Each introduction of a concept was followed by activities in which the learners could practise the strategies.
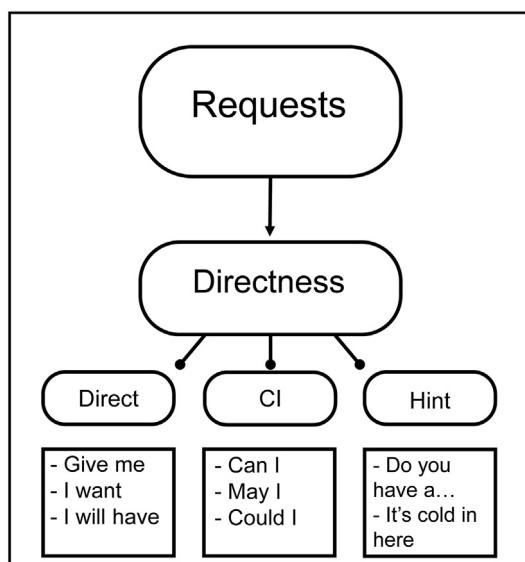

Fig. 2. Scientific concepts relating to requests, with sub-concepts for directness, and examples of pragmalinguistic resources within each sub-concept (also presented in Myrset, 2021).

Table 1
Scientific concepts for pragmalinguistic strategies employed during the instruction (adapted from Myrset, 2021).

	Scientific concepts	
	Blum-Kulka et al. (1989)	Adapted
Directness levels		
	Direct	Direct[a]
	Conventionally indirect	In-between
	Non-conventionally indirect/hints	Hint[a]
Internal modification[b]		
	Attention getters	Attention getters
	Title/role	Address term
	Lexical downgraders	Polite words[c]
External modification		
	Grounder	Reason
	Sweetener	Compliment
	Promise of reward	Promise

[a] The terms 'direct' and 'hint' were employed due to similarities to their Norwegian equivalents (*direkte* and *hint*).
[b] Although modal verbs can function as syntactic downgraders (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989), these were introduced in relation to directness levels, and were thus not in focus independently during the instruction.
[c] The term 'polite' was used for three reasons: 1) Considering the learners' age, the term itself was one that they were familiar with and to which they could attach meaning. 2) It was grounded in learning aims from the national curriculum, namely an ability to "use expressions of politeness and appropriate expressions for the situation" (Udir, 2006). 3) The term functioned as a starting point for raising the learners' awareness about the contextually situated and sometimes idiosyncratic interpretations of the term (Watts, 2003).

The instruction on pragmalinguistic resources provided the learners with a repertoire that they could employ when introduced to the sociopragmatic dimension, a prerequisite for making informed choices when requesting and ultimately becoming agentive L2 users (van Compernolle and Williams, 2012). Each session focusing on the pragmalinguistic dimension followed a structure of introduction, activity, and reflection (see Table 2), thus taking a dialectical approach between theory (scientific knowledge) and practical activity (Lantolf and Poehner, 2014). To avoid cognitive overload, each session introduced one concept (van Compernolle et al., 2016). The subsequent sessions started by reminding the learners of the previous concept before introducing the next.

Table 2
Structure of the instruction on pragmalinguistics.

Introduction	A concept is introduced by exploring its pragmalinguistic resources and functions.
Activity	A written or oral task where learners work, individually, in pairs, or in groups and practise using the pragmalinguistic resources.
Reflection	A discussion in groups or class on the use of the pragmalinguistic resource that instantiate the concept presented in the introduction, also by employing L1 experiences.

Due to the cyclical nature of the sessions, these functioned as a dialectic, constantly moving between scientific concepts and lived experiences in activities and reflections to foster development (Lantolf and Poehner, 2014; Vygotsky, 2012/1934). Moreover, the cyclical nature of the instruction from one scientific concept to the next enabled the learners to revisit previously introduced concepts, which aimed to support their reflections as well as the internalisation of conceptual knowledge. Table 3 provides an overview of the instruction on pragmalinguistics.

Table 3
Overview of pragmalinguistic concepts (the numbers to the left refer to each individual session).

	Scientific concepts	Examples of pragmalinguistic resources included
1	Directness levels/modal verbs	May, could, would
2	Downgrader	Please, perhaps, possibly
3	Alerter	Excuse me, pardon me, sorry
4	Address terms	Mr, miss, sir, madam, dude, mate, love,
5	Supportive moves	Grounder, sweetener, promise of reward
6	Summary	All of the above

The first session focusing on the pragmalinguistic dimension aimed to introduce request directness levels. First, requests as an overarching concept was explained and, following Searle (1979), defined for the learners as 'when we ask someone for something we want or for someone to do something for us'. The learners were then told that requests would be in focus for the next four weeks. Following the definition, the leaners were shown two video clips and instructed to pay attention to the characters' requests. The video clips used were scenes from the movie *Dumb and Dumber* and the TV series *The Big Bang Theory*.

In the scene from *Dumb and Dumber*,[5] Harry and Lloyd are seated at a table in a diner when a waitress comes over with their food. Lloyd asks the waitress "What is the soup du jour?", to which the waitress responds, "It's the soup of the day". This prompts Lloyd to produce a direct request ("Mmm. That sounds good. I'll have that."). As the waitress is about to leave, she asks if they need anything else. Harry grabs his glass and requests a new glass of soda through a hint ("My soda's flat. It doesn't have any bubbles.").

In the scene from *The Big Bang Theory*,[6] Sheldon and Amy are seated at the dinner table, discussing Sheldon's dilemma of choosing between a PlayStation and an Xbox. Three requests, in which Amy asks Sheldon to pass her the butter, were in focus. First, Amy produces a conventionally indirect request ("Can you get the butter, please?") to which Sheldon gets up and walks to the refrigerator. Second, whilst Sheldon is holding the butter in his hand and explaining his dilemma, she repeats the request, this time as a direct request ("Pass the butter."). Finally, after Sheldon has accused Amy of not taking him seriously, followed by an exchange in which Amy pretends to be engaged in the conversation, Sheldon asks her "What should I do?", to which Amy repeatedly slams the table with her hand and yells "Please, pass the butter!", again resorting to a direct request.

The two clips were played consecutively on a projector screen and, afterwards, the class was asked 'What did they ask for in the clips, and what did they say?'. Following the collaborative dialogue, in which the learners collectively identified the requests, the requests from the scenes were presented on a projector screen (Fig. 3).

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[5] *Dumb and Dumber* (Extended version): 22:28–23:23 min.
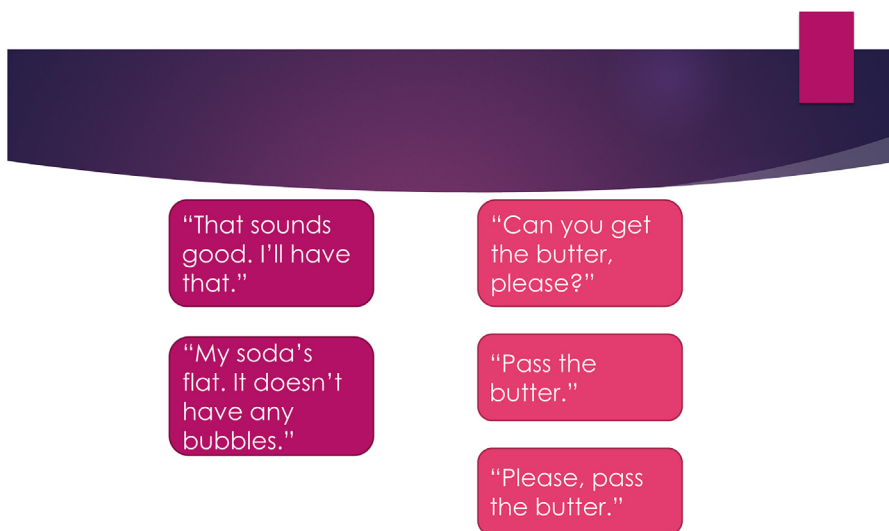[6] *The Big Bang Theory,* Series 7, Episode 19: 4:15–6:04 min.

Fig. 3. Slide from the instruction. Requests produced in the video clips.

The learners were then told that these requests could be placed into three categories (explanations for the learners, drawing on previous literature (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Blum-Kulka and Olshtain, 1984; Svanes, 1989), are presented in brackets): direct ('when we are perfectly clear about what it is we want the person to do by telling them'), in-between ('when we are clear about what it is we want, but we give the person a choice of saying no. These are often presented as a question'), and hint ('the opposite of being direct. When what we want the person to do is not completely clear from what we are actually saying and can be understood in more ways than one'). The learners were then asked where the requests from the scenes should be placed on the continuum (Fig. 4).
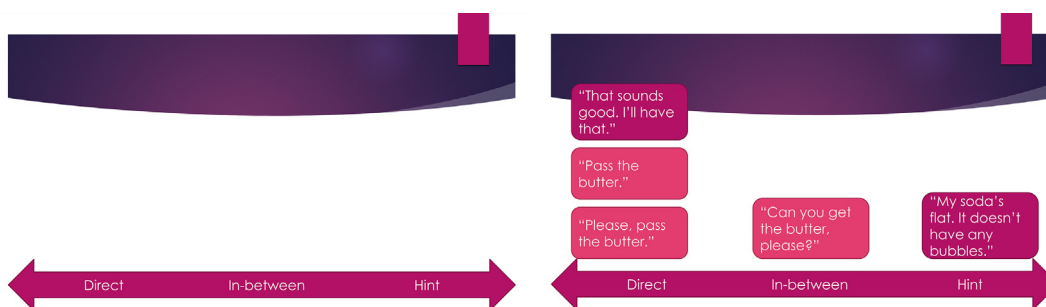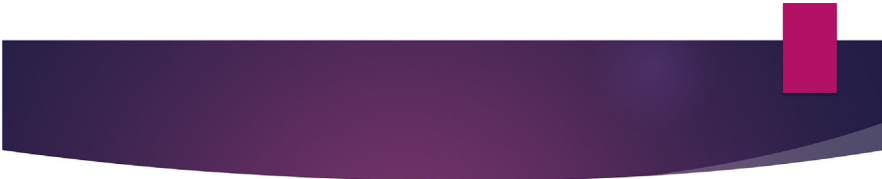
Fig. 4. Slides from the instruction. A continuum of directness and the requests produced in the video clips.

Finally, in pairs, the learners were provided with a worksheet comprising nine requests (three for each directness level, see Table 4) and asked to change the directness, for instance, from direct to hint. During this activity, the directness levels and examples of pragmalinguistic resources were displayed on a projector screen (Fig. 5), which served as an orienting basis (Morollón Martí, 2021; Nicholas, 2015). Thus, the learners' language development was mediated both through the researcher

Table 4
Requests used in the worksheet where the learners were asked to change from one directness level to another.

Concept	Request
Direct	• Give me a pencil.
	• I want an apple.
	• Help me.
In-between	• Can you give me a ball?
	• Would you mind telling me where the museum is?
	• May I have a glass of water?
Hint	• Do you have a pencil?
	• It's cold in here.
	• The kitchen is a mess.

Direct	In between	Hint
Give me…	Can I…	Do you have…
I want…	Can you…	I am hungry.
Pass the…	May I…	It is cold here.
Send me the…	Could I…	
Clean your room.	Could you…	
	Would you…	
	Would it be possible for you to…	
	Would it be possible to have…	

Fig. 5. Directness levels and pragmalinguistic resources presented to the learners.

explaining the phenomenon and facilitating the discussions, as well as the visual representation of the continuum with pragmalinguistic resources (Kozulin, 2018).

The focus on scientific concepts and language resources related to the pragmalinguistic dimension provided the foundation for the sessions emphasising the sociopragmatic dimension. These sessions aimed to raise awareness of how the sociopragmatic dimension provides information and possibly affects the requestive force. However, following van Compernolle (2014), the learners were not provided with explicit rules of thumb as to when and to whom a request strategy should be employed. Table 5 provides an overview of the instruction focusing on sociopragmatics.

Table 5
Overview of sociopragmatic topics introduced.

	Topic	In focus
7	Context	Awareness-raising of how the context may influence the requestive force
8	Interlocutor	Familiarity and age
9	Context	Place
10	Context	Situation
11	Interlocutor and context	Familiarity, age, place, and situation
12	Summary	Pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic dimensions

The first session introduced the sociopragmatic dimension through the use of images. First, decontextualised requests were presented, and the learners were asked to identify the pragmalinguistic resources and the scientific concepts in the request, thus accessing prior knowledge through learners externalising their conceptual understandings of requests, Second, images were used to provide learners with the context in which the request was produced. This aimed to raise awareness of the interplay between the pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic dimensions. Fig. 6 shows how the sociopragmatic dimension was introduced.
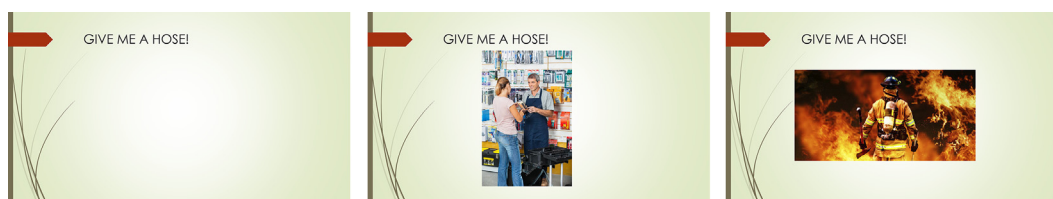

Fig. 6. Slides for introducing the sociopragmatic dimension.

Through the first slide in Fig. 6, the learners were presented with a direct request and told that it was written in capitalised letters to signal that someone was yelling 'Give me a hose!'. The class was then asked what the statement meant to ensure that everyone understood its meaning before proceeding, and if they could identify the directness level (pragmalinguistics). The researcher then showed the request in relation to the picture from the DIY shop and explained to the learners that the customer was yelling this remark to the clerk. The learners were subsequently asked what they thought about the request being performed in the shop in this manner. Finally, the researcher showed the slide from the fire and asked the learners what they thought about the request in this situation. Following the presentation of three requests with images, the learners discussed the importance of the context, thus raising awareness of the sociopragmatic dimension. The subsequent sessions followed a similar pattern in which visual stimuli, e.g. images, videos, and learners as props, were used to draw attention to the topic in focus followed by subsequent activities and discussions for prompting reflection. During these discussions the researcher served as a mediator, and the learners' L1 and lived experiences were used as a scaffold to express understandings (Chavarría and Bonany, 2006; Eun and Lim, 2009; McConachy, 2018).

3.4. Data collection

The current study aimed to explore the learners' pragmalinguistic development following the instruction. Thus, data was collected in a pre-, post-, and delayed post-test by learners in friendship groups of 4–5 (Pinter and Zandian, 2014), rather than proficiency groups. Although Ishihara and Chiba (2014) found that learners showed more variety in written form, the written DCT has been heavily criticised for its "inability to capture the features of spoken language and natural interaction" (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2013:22). Consequently, this project employed a VODCT, adapted from previous studies (Savić et al., 2021; Savić & Myrset, In press), as it ensured comparable data and oral-for-oral (matched modality) testing (Bardovi-Harlig, 2018). The VODCT comprised eight English language-learning videos (23 request scenarios in total), with child characters in different contexts. The selection was based on familiar situations, e.g. at a restaurant or at a friend's house, and with interlocutors of different familiarity and age, such as a friend, a parent, or a waiter (See Appendix A). For comparability, the same videos were used in each test in a randomised order.

Before a character produced a request, the video was paused, and the learners were shown a printed screenshot of the scenario as an additional visual stimulus. They were then asked what they thought the characters would say, e.g. 'The girl doesn't have a crayon. What do you think she asks her friend?'. Each test was completed within a week: two weeks before the instruction (pre-test), in the week following the instruction (post-test), and six weeks after the instruction (delayed post-test). During the post-test, the pilot group displayed weariness with the task, so the delayed post-test was adjusted to include only the visual prompts from four (out of eight) of the videos. The researcher reminded the learners of the scenario in which the request took place, followed by the same questions as in the pre- and post-test. Consequently, although the number of requests produced was lower in the delayed post-test, it was considered the optimal alternative to skewed results which may have resulted from the learners' inattention or boredom. The tests were audio-recorded and the learners' responses were transcribed verbatim. All the learners participated through providing requests.

Whereas studies within SCT tend to use methods such as dynamic assessment, e.g. using production tasks in which learners also provide explanations of their choices, the tasks here focused specifically on the pragmalinguistic dimension of the learners' request production. Previous research has found that such assessment resulted in some learners experiencing their communication being slowed down (Nicholas, 2015). Moreover, in research with children there is a power imbalance between children and the adult researcher and the school context may cause additional pressure (Myrset and Savić, 2021; Pinter and Zandian, 2014; Punch, 2002). Thus, to ensure that the learners could produce and process language without too many requirements at one time, the VODCT did not aim to further probe their choices. Group interviews focusing on the learners' (meta)pragmatic awareness, their internalisation of conceptual knowledge, and their choices related to requesting were conducted separately.[7] Whereas this may be considered a limitation of the VODCT, as it does not elicit the learners' reasoning, it provides a record of their impromptu responses to the tasks, where the learners employed resources immediately available, regarded herein as a prerequisite for becoming agentive L2 users.

3.5. Analysis

The tests resulted in a total of 2180 requests. Using the Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) coding manual, the requests were coded in SPSS (IBM) by the researcher based on the pragmalinguistic categories introduced during instruction (Table 1), such as directness levels, i.e. direct, conventionally indirect, and hints, and the modal verbs employed, e.g. *can* and *could.* Although the VODCT was conducted in groups, each request produced was analysed in full, including instances where learners within a group produced similar requests.

A subgroup of requests (n = 165) labelled 'Requests for information', e.g. 'How much is it?',[8] was omitted from the analysis, leaving 2015 requests (pre: 699, post: 872, delayed: 444). These were analysed in cooperation with a statistician to ensure

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[7] The results from the interviews, and the learners' externalisation of scientific concepts, are presented in Myrset (2021).

[8] Ellis (1992) argued for excluding such requests. In the current study they were not in focus during instruction, and would thus skew the results of the analysis.

appropriate analyses: chi square tests of independence to investigate the discrepancies between observed and expected frequencies of language use in the tests, and z-tests for probability of proportions between the tests, namely from pre- to post-test (Pre-Post), from post- to delayed post-test (Post-Del), and from pre- to delayed post-test (Pre-Del). In other words, by using the pre-test as reference for performance prior to the instruction, the chi-square test measured the differences in the frequency of occurrence of specific language resources and the z-test the increase or decrease of post-instruction use; first to explore learner retention (RQ1), then in relation to the interlocutor (RQ2). Consequently, the analyses tracked whether there was a change in the pragmalinguistic repertoire and variation depending on familiarity and age of the interlocutor, and if this change was statistically significant, with the alpha value set at $p < .05$.

4. Results

To explore the learners' pragmalinguistic repertoire when requesting (RQ1), Section 4.1 presents statistical analyses of the pragmalinguistic resources introduced during the instruction. Section 4.2 subsequently presents their variation depending on familiarity and age of the interlocutor (RQ2), with the aim of exploring whether the learners employed specific resources more frequently with specific interlocutors.

4.1. Development of a pragmalinguistic repertoire

In order to investigate the use of request strategies over the three tests, a chi square test of difference and a z-test of proportions were conducted. Table 6 presents the distribution of directness levels in each test.

Table 6
Use of directness levels.

		Test (raw frequencies)			Chi square test		z-test sig.		
		Pre	Post	Del. post	X^2	Sig.	Pre-Post	Post-Del	Pre-Del
Directness	Direct	127	239	95	13.2444	.000[b]	.000	.041	.228
		18.2%	27.4%	21.4%					
	Conv. Indirect	487	521	290			.015	.224	.384
		69.7%	59.7%	65.3%					
	Hint	85	112	59			.704	.833	0.600
		12.2%	12.8%	13.3%					
	Total	699	872	444[a]					
	Avg. per scenario	30.39	37.91	34.15					

[a] The delayed post-test comprised only half of the scenarios, hence the lower number.
[b] Significant results are marked in bold.

The directness levels employed were somewhat consistent longer-term (Pre-Del). A decrease in the use of conventionally indirect requests in Pre-Post ($Z = 2.44$[9], $p = .015$) is reflected in the increased use of direct strategies ($Z = -3.77$, $p < .001$), subsequently marked by a decrease in Post-Del ($Z = 2.05$, $p = .041$), resulting in no statistically significant changes longer-term (Pre-Del). Table 7 presents the raw frequencies of modal verbs employed, and the results of the chi-square and z-tests.

Table 7
Use of modal verbs. Significant results are marked in bold.

		Test (raw frequencies)			Chi square test		z-test sig.		
		Pre-test	Post-test	Del. Post	X^2	Sig.	Pre- Post	Post-Del	Pre- Del
Modals	Can	389	327	203	76.5941	.000	.001	.444	.033
		81.9%[a]	63.6%	68.1%					
	May[b]	38	79	38			.001	.344	.040
		8.0%	15.4%	12.8%					
	Could[b]	5	50	47			.000	.016	.000
		1.1%	9.7%	15.8%					
	Would[b]	30	43	5			.236	.000	.003
		6.3%	8.4%	1.7%					
	Other	13	15	5			.865	.278	.348
		2.7%	2.9%	1.7%					
	Total	475	514	298					
		68.0%[c]	58.9%	67.1%					

[a] Indicates the frequency of use within the category.
[b] Presented during instruction.
[c] Indicates the frequency of use within the total number of requests produced.

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[9] The z-values indicate language use in relation to the subsequent test, e.g. from pre- to post-test (Pre-Post): positive z-values signal a decrease, negative z-values signal an increase.

Can was by far the most utilised modal verb in all three tests, accounting for 81.9% of the instances in the pre-test, with a reduction to 68.1% in the delayed post-test. This reduction was also reflected in the z-test, which shows a statistically significant decrease in Pre-Del ($Z = 2.13$, $p = .033$). *May*, on the other hand, almost doubled between the pre-test (8.0%) and the post-test (15.4%), but decreased in the delayed post-test (12.8%), resulting in a statistically significant increase in Pre-Post ($Z = -3.37$ $p = .001$) and Pre-Del ($Z = -2.05$, $p = .04$). *Could* was rarely employed in the pre-test (1.1%), but increased for the post-test (9.7%) and the delayed post-test (15.8%), with statistically significant increases in Pre-Post ($Z = -5.78$, $p < .001$), Post-Del ($Z = -2.40$, $p = .016$), and Pre-Del ($Z = -7.68$, $p < .001$). Finally, *would* had a slight increase between the pre-test (6.3%) and the post-test (8.4%), but a decrease in the delayed post-test (1.7%), resulting in a statistically significant decrease both in Post-Del ($Z = 3.78$, $p < .001$) and Pre-Del ($Z = 2.95$, $p = .003$).

In addition to the modal verbs, chi-square tests and z-tests were conducted for attention getters, address terms, and lexical downgraders, but few significant changes were identified (see Appendix B). For attention getters, there was a considerable decrease in frequencies in the delayed post-test, but with no statistically significant changes except for the use of *sorry* in Pre-Del ($Z = -3.03$, $p = .002$). Only on three occasions in the delayed post-test did the learners employ attention getters, respectively *excuse me* (2) and *sorry* (1).

For downgraders, the chi-square test revealed significant differences ($X^2 = 11.2574$, $p = .01$). However, the raw frequencies show that, apart from *please*, there was limited use in all three tests. Similarly, the analysis of address terms revealed no statistical significance. Indeed, the learners seem to have opted for strategies with which they were already familiar, with most address terms employed being those directed to parents, such as in "Mum and dad, can I have this hat, please? I really like it.". This request was also modified with a supportive move (grounder), another concept in focus during instruction, presented in Table 8.

Table 8
Use of supportive moves. Significant results are marked in bold.

		Test (raw frequencies)			Chi square test		z-test sig.		
		Pre-test	Post-test	Del. Post	X^2	Sig.	Pre- Post	Post-Del	Pre- Del
Supportive moves	Grounder[a]	68	96	65	6.0914	**.048**	.424	.714	.285
		73.1%	64.0%	60.7%					
	Sweetener[a]	13	35	34			.106	.208	**.010**
		14.0%	23.0%	31.8%					
	Preparator	12	18	8			.860	.254	.226
		12.9%	12.0%	7.5%					
	Total	93	149	107					
		13.3%[b]	17.1%	24.1%					

[a] Presented during instruction.
[b] Indicates the frequency of use within the total number of requests produced.

The result of the chi-square test shows a statistical significance ($X^2 = 6.091$, $p = .048$), and the use of supportive moves almost doubled from pre- to delayed post-test. However, the learners did not employ promises of reward, which were also introduced during the instruction. The z-test also reveal an increase in occurrences of sweeteners, which was statistically significant in Pre-Del ($Z = -2.59$, $p = .01$), indicating longer-term retention in this category.

4.2. Pragmalinguistic variation in relation to familiarity and age

Turning to the second research question, that is, whether the learners employed different strategies depending on familiarity and age, language use was analysed in relation to the interlocutor, i.e. friend (familiar, no age difference), familiar adult, and unfamiliar adult, reflecting the interlocutor relations in the videos. However, due to relatively low variation and use of alerters and internal modification introduced during instruction (Appendix B), these were not analysed. Table 9 presents the distribution of the directness levels of requests employed with interlocutors differing in familiarity and age.

Table 9

Use of directness levels depending on interlocutor. Significant results are marked in bold.

		Test (raw frequencies)			Chi square test		z-test sig.		
		Pre	Post	Del. Post	X^2	Sig.	Pre- Post	Post-Del	Pre- Del
Unfamiliar adult	Direct	74	110	36	4.8629	**.027**	.176	.080	.517
		23.2%	28.4%	20.3%					
	CI	208	221	125			.170	.057	.481
		65.2%	57.1%	70.6%					
	Hint	37	56	16			.295	.094	.404
		11.6%	14.5%	9.0%					
	Total	319	387	177					
Familiar adult	Direct	28	80	53	8.5246	**.004**	**.001**	.270	**.022**
		16.8%	34.6%	28.5%					
	CI	121	132	115			.059	.537	.223
		72.5%	57.1%	61.8%					
	Hint	18	19	18			.410	.621	.746
		10.8%	8.2%	9.7%					
	Total	167	231	186					
Friend	Direct	25	49	6	12.8634	**.000**	**.041**	**.022**	.307
		11.7%	19.3%	7.4%					
	CI	158	168	50			.301	.668	.257
		74.2%	66.1%	61.7%					
	Hint	30	37	25			.891	**.003**	**.003**
		14.1%	14.6%	30.9%					
	Total	213	254	81					

As in Section 4.1, the majority of requests in all the tests were conventionally indirect. However, hints were more frequent in requests to friends than to familiar adults (e.g. parents) and unfamiliar adults (e.g. a waiter), both with a more frequent use of direct strategies. The increased use of hints was reflected in the z-test for Post-Del ($Z = -2.97$, $p = .003$) and Pre-Del ($Z = -2.97$, $p = .003$). With friends, there was also an increase of direct requests in Pre-Post ($Z = -2.04$, $p = .041$), followed by a decrease in Post-Del ($Z = 2.30$, $p = .022$). Table 10 presents the modals employed in relation to the interlocutor.

While the tests for modal verbs in Section 4.1 showed a statistically significant decrease in the use of *can* in Pre-Post and Pre-Del, a significant decrease was only identified in requests to unfamiliar adults in Pre-Post ($Z = 2.90$, $p = .004$). However,

Table 10

Use of modal verbs depending on interlocutor. Significant results are marked in bold.

		Test (raw frequencies)			Chi square test		z-test sig.		
		Pre-test	Post-test	Del. post	X^2	Sig.	Pre- Post	Post-Del	Pre- Del
Unfamiliar adult	Can	181	134	77	47.3180	**.000**	**.004**	.502	.086
		74.8%	53.8%	59.2%					
	May	24	54	23			**.001**	.413	**.044**
		9.9%	21.7%	17.7%					
	Could	3	28	24			**.000**	.072	**.000**
		1.2%	11.2%	18.5%					
	Would	27	27	2			.917	**.002**	**.002**
		11.2%	10.8%	1.5%					
	Other	7	6	4			.742	.704	.921
		2.9%	2.4%	3.1%					
	Total	242	249	130					
		75.9%	64.3%	73.4%					
Familiar adult	Can	112	107	89	11.9585	**.008**	.214	.887	.184
		91.1%	77.0%	75.4%					
	May	7	14	9			.211	.514	.560
		5.7%	10.1%	7.6%					
	Could	2	11	16			**.023**	.164	**.001**
		1.6%	7.9%	13.6%					
	Would	0	6	3			**.021**	.449	.077
		0.0%	4.3%	2.5%					
	Other	2	1	1			.494	.908	.588
		1.6%	0.7%	0.8%					
	Total	123	139	118					
		73.7%	60.2%	63.4%					
Friend	Can	96	86	37	16.8491	**.001**	.097	.681	.393
		87.3%	68.3%	74.0%					
	May	7	11	6			.511	.529	.246
		6.4%	8.7%	12.0%					
	Could	0	11	7			**.002**	.324	**.000**
		0.0%	8.7%	14.0%					
	Would	3	10	0			.089	**.046**	.243
		2.7%	7.9%	0.0%					

(continued on next page)

Table 10 (*continued*)

		Test (raw frequencies)			Chi square test		z-test sig.		
		Pre-test	Post-test	Del. post	X^2	Sig.	Pre- Post	Post-Del	Pre- Del
	Other	4	8	0			.357	.075	.178
		3.6%	6.3%	0.0%					
	Total	110	126	50					
		51.6%	49.6%	61.7%					

the decreased use of *can* in the delayed post-test was a trend with all interlocutors. Similarly, the use of *may* increased with all interlocutors following the instruction, but was only statistically significant with unfamiliar adults in Pre-Post ($Z = -3.27$, $p = .001$) and Pre-Del ($Z = -2.01$, $p = .044$). As for *could*, similar to findings in Section 4.1, its use showed a statistically significant increase with all interlocutors and in both tests following the instruction. The majority of scenarios in which *could* was employed were those with unfamiliar adults. Finally, albeit inconsistent in use, *would* was the most prevalent with unfamiliar adults. Still, its use decreased both in Post-Del ($Z = 3.11$, $p = .002$) and the Pre-Del ($Z = 3.17$, $p = .002$). *Would* increased in requests to familiar adults in Pre-Post ($Z = -2.30$, $p = .021$), but decreased with friends in Post-Del ($Z = 1.99$, $p = .046$), further reflecting its inconsistent use.

Following the test of modal verbs, a chi-square test and a z-test were conducted for downgraders, which revealed no statistical significance with *please* being the preferred choice. However, the frequencies in the delayed post-test revealed that the learners employed downgraders more often in requests to familiar (26.3%) and unfamiliar adults (28.8%) than friends (9.9%). Indeed, only 9.8% of all the downgraders employed in the three tests were in requests directed to friends. Finally, Table 11 shows the use of supportive moves.

Table 11
Use of supportive moves depending on interlocutor. Significant results are marked in bold.

		Test (raw frequencies)			Chi square test		z-test sig.		
		Pre	Post	Del. post	X^2	Sig.	Pre- Post	Post-Del	Pre- Del
Unfamiliar adult	Grounder	10	20	19	6.3879	**.041**	.836	.675	.890
		33.3%	30.8%	35.2%					
	Sweetener	13	35	34			.503	.516	.249
		43.3%	53.8%	63.0%					
	Preparator	7	10	1			.395	**.016**	**.002**
		23.3%	15.4%	1.9%					
	Total	30	65	54					
		9.4%	16.8%	30.5%					
Familiar adult	Grounder	25	46	41	1.7056	.426	1.000	.911	.924
		100.0%	100.0%	97.6%					
	Preparator	0	0	1			–	.295	.440
		0.0%	0.0%	2.4%					
	Total	25	46	42					
		15.0%	19.9%	22.6%					
Friend	Grounder	33	30	5	8.5849	**.014**	.705	.247	.170
		86.8%	78.9%	45.5%					
	Preparator	5	8	6			.405	.067	**.011**
		13.2%	21.1%	54.5%					
	Total	38	38	11					
		17.8%	15.0%	13.6%					

Some notable differences were found in the supportive moves employed to interlocutors of different familiarity and age. Grounders were employed with all interlocutors. While preparators were employed with all interlocutors, they were only used once with familiar adults (delayed post-test). Sweeteners, on the other hand, were only employed with unfamiliar adults. Consequently, the chi-square test revealed statistical significance with unfamiliar adults ($X^2 = 6.3879$, $p = .041$) and friends ($X^2 = 8.5849$, $p = .014$), but not with familiar adults.

5. Discussion

To explore the impact of instruction, the study aimed to examine the learners' pragmalinguistic repertoire and its variation depending on the familiarity and age of the interlocutor. However, the results and the ensuing discussion should be regarded with some limitations in mind. The data from this study is the result of a short instructional period (4 h in total), where the researcher served as a mediator, and hence does not fully reflect a natural school environment with the learners' English teacher. In addition, the study employed a small sample with no control group, so claims cannot be made about a larger population. At the same time, the number of participants by far exceeded the samples included in most previous SCT-informed studies. Thus, this study offers valuable insights about the affordances of pragmatics instruction within SCT as it relates to instruction with intact classes. Moreover, the data was elicited through a VODCT, which has limitations due to its

controlled nature, and thus does not reflect authentic language use. From the SCT perspective, two aspects of the data elicitation instrument may also be considered limitations: Firstly, the study explored only the learners' request production, and secondly, the same videos were used in all three tests for comparability. Compared to other SCT-informed studies, using dynamic assessment to investigate how learners externalise their conceptual understanding and how it guides their choices in novel situations, the current study does not provide insights into the learners' language use and reasoning in new contexts. Thus, the study can shed light on trends of request production with regard to sociopragmatics, and thus tap into the learners' intuitive choices, but not their reasoning. However, considering the participants' age, and regarding access to pragmalinguistic resources as a prerequisite for their agency in English, employing the VODCT was deemed a viable approach. Some of its limitations were pointed out by a learner, Naomi[10], in an exchange[11] during the post-test:

Naomi:	*Will you listen to see what we've learnt?*
Researcher:	*Mmm.*
Naomi:	*It's possible we've learnt more, just that it's not how we would say it. Then you can't say we haven't learnt it.*
Researcher:	*No, I can't.*
Naomi:	*Because we say it in the way that's the most pleasant* [appropriate], *and then it's possible we've learnt a lot even if we don't say it now.*
Researcher:	*Yes, that's true.*
Naomi:	*And then it's difficult for you to research.*

After the first video of the post-test, Naomi stopped the researcher, voicing a concern for how she would come across in the test, and for the research itself. She thus highlighted the inherent limitations of the DCT (e.g. Bardovi-Harlig, 2018; Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2013), which restrains the opportunities for production to what the learners regard as appropriate in specific situations, rather than providing a full picture of the learning outcomes.

The majority of the requests produced were conventionally indirect, similar to Savić's (2015) findings, albeit less frequent than in her 6th-grade data. The data elicitation techniques and the request scenarios may partly explain the difference between the findings. In this study, for example, 161 (34.9%) of the direct requests were produced in three request scenarios of service encounters in restaurants, which could reflect the learners' awareness of the contextual nature of the speech act (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). There was also a clear distinction between the distribution of direct requests and hints produced to friends and those to adults.

In previous studies, hints have been found to be difficult for young learners to comprehend as they occur later in development (Bernicot et al., 2007; Cekaite, 2013; Savić & Myrset, In press), which makes a finding from this study particularly interesting. Namely, some learners commented on their request production by externalising their conceptual understanding:

Jack: I don't find it easy using chopsticks. *Like, a* hint*, you know.*

Considering findings by Savić & Myrset (In press), where learners had difficulties making sense of hints, comments such as this suggest that the concept-based instruction facilitated comprehension. By producing a hint accompanied with a conceptual label, Jack showed that, beyond production, he had grasped their communicative function. Moreover, comments such as Jack's provide evidence of the learners' conceptual understanding as a consequence of instruction. This conceptual understanding indicates that drawing attention to scientific concepts scaffolds young learners' metapragmatic awareness, as found in studies with older learners (Henery, 2015; van Compernolle, 2014; van Compernolle et al., 2016), thus showing that conceptual understanding of pragmatics is attainable for young learners. Moreover, comments such as those provided by Jack and Naomi reveal that the learners had internalised scientific concepts and employed them, as well as used them to support their agency − both important from an SCT perspective. Indeed, this is supported by findings, based on the present project, where scientific concepts were used to highlight the importance of pragmalinguistic choices in requesting (Myrset, 2021). Although exploring the learners' internalisation of concepts was beyond the scope of the current study, these comments, together with findings from the same group of learners using scientific concepts to express metapragmatic understandings (Myrset, 2021), indicate that concept-based approaches hold promise for pragmatics instruction with young learners, thus a potential avenue for future research. Since the impromptu comments presented herein occurred during the VODCT, an oral test in which the responses are immediate compared to the written DCT (Ishihara and Chiba, 2014), this elicitation technique could also be modified to provide instant responses followed by learners' reasoning.

In the post- and delayed post-test there was an increased variation in the use of modal verbs as compared to the pre-test, as well as in previous research with learners in the same age group (Savić, 2015; Savić et al., 2021). The decreased use of *can* and the increased use of *may* and *could* indicates that the learners had developed a wider repertoire, which was robust longer-term. *Could* and *may* were also more often employed with unfamiliar adults, suggesting that these were the interlocutors or scenarios where the learners found them more appropriate. Such shifts in modality have been found in previous instruction studies (Ishihara and Chiba, 2014). Thus, the current study provides further evidence that instruction facilitates young learners' pragmalinguistic development. Specifically, a concept-based approach charts a path towards agency by providing young learners with a wider repertoire necessary for making choices in social action. Examples 1−3, showing Alex's requests to a teacher in the three tests, illustrate this. While Alex produced a direct request in the pre-test, he chose to employ

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[10] All the names presented are pseudonyms.

[11] The excerpts have been translated into English by the researcher, with italicised parts originally produced in Norwegian.

conventionally indirect requests following the instruction modified by *can* in the post-test and *could* in the delayed post-test, thus further refining his requests.

(1) I'll take the orange paper. (Pre)
(2) I like the orange one. Can I have it? (Post)
(3) Could I have the orange one instead? (Delayed)

Attention getters hardly appeared in the delayed post-test, which was likely a consequence of only using half of the scenarios for this test. 80 (59.3%) of all the attention getters employed in the pre- and post-tests occurred in two scenarios not included in the delayed post-test: a boy speaking to a friend's mother over the phone and a boy asking a woman for directions. However, based on their use in the pre- and post-test, it seems that the learners were somewhat acquainted with them, and consequently there were no significant changes in this category.

Similarly, address terms were not subject to statistically significant variation. The learners relied mostly on familiar address terms, with 60.3% of them directed to parents, e.g. *Mum* and *Dad*. Whilst address terms such as *Mr* and *Mrs* were introduced during the instruction, these terms are near extinct in Norwegian (the learners' L1) (Fretheim, 2005) and previous research has found that young Norwegian learners do not find them important in the L1 (Savić and Myrset, 2021). Thus, the absence of these address terms in the present dataset, may indicate that the learners chose not to use them. Since their use were at odds with L1 practices, this could be the result of the learners' culturally situated preferences, originating from their own context, which they chose to rely on when requesting in the L2 (Liddicoat and McConachy, 2019; Savić and Myrset, 2021). Consequently, as language choice was promoted throughout the instruction and the L1 was used as scaffolding for meaning-making (Chavarría and Bonany, 2006; McConachy, 2013; Savić and Myrset, 2021), the absence of such titles could be attributed to agentive language use rather than to insufficient instruction. However, due to the nature of the study, this can only be inferred, and future studies could investigate this systematically.

Similar to previous findings with young Norwegian learners (Savić, 2015; Savić et al., 2021), *please* was the preferred strategy for lexical downgrading. However, following the instruction, the learners started using *perhaps* and *possibly* both as a sole downgrader or accompanied with the marker *please*. Moreover, downgraders were employed in only 9.8% of requests to friends, indicating that the learners felt less inclined to employ them with friends than with adults. Albeit still limited, the appearance of *perhaps* and *possibly*, as well as the overreliance on *please*, suggests a potential for more focused attention on lexical down-graders during instruction to expand young learners' pragmalinguistic repertoire and foster language agency. In the Norwegian context, considering that there is no direct equivalent to *please* (Fretheim, 2005), its use could be explained as an over-generalisation of a politeness rule (van Compernolle, 2014), which becomes an almost fossilised request strategy in the L2.

The frequencies of supportive moves increased from the pre-test (13.3%) to the delayed post-test (24.1%), with a statistically significant increase of sweeteners longer-term. In previous research with Norwegian EFL learners, Savić (2015) found that the 12-year-old learners used supportive moves in 21.1% of their requests, but mainly relied on grounders. Similarly, the 7th-graders in the study by Savić et al. (2021) employed supportive moves in 19.8% of the requests, where most of the supportive moves were either grounders or sweeteners. The present study reveals learner development following the instruction, both with regard to their frequency of use more generally, and with a significant increase in the use of sweeteners. Previous research (Savić, 2015; Taguchi and Kim, 2016) shows that learners seem to be familiar with grounders and produce them with ease prior to instruction, and consequently the increased use of other supportive moves in this study expanded the learners' pragmalinguistic repertoire. Sweeteners were only employed in scenarios with unfamiliar adults, such as those produced by Anne when asking a friend's mother for more soup.

(4) It was really good. Can I get some more? (Pre)
(5) You did a really great job at this soup. Can I have some more? (Post)
(6) You could win Masterchef with this soup. Can I get some more? (Delayed)

With familiar adults the supportive moves were mainly grounders, such as in the requests produced in a scenario by William, who chose to employ grounders in the post- and delayed post-test:

(7) Mum and dad, can I get the kite? (Pre)
(8) Mum, dad, can I get that kite please? I really like it. (Post)
(9) Mum, I really like that kite. Can I get it, please? (Delayed)

As illustrated by examples 4—9, Anne and William employed supportive moves with unfamiliar and familiar adults. Anne employed a sweetener in all three tests. However, following the instruction, she changed the focus from the soup itself ('It was really good'), to directing attention towards the person who had made it (e.g. 'You could win Masterchef with this soup.'). As this changed focus occurred in both the post- and delayed post-test, from a developmental perspective the focused attention and use of scientific concepts during the instruction increased Anne's awareness of the function and focus in sweeteners that she could use to make an informed choice. Moreover, her lived experiences, i.e. using references from a reality TV program, further allowed her to display her agency by using them as scaffolding (Chavarría and Bonany, 2006; Liddicoat and McConachy, 2019; Savić and Myrset, 2021; van Compernolle, 2014). William, on the other hand, did not employ a supportive move in the pre-test, but opted for grounders in the subsequent tests (e.g. "I really like it."). The examples reveal two different developmental trajectories from the instruction: Anne, who further refined her strategy, and William, who employed supportive moves post-instruction.

An important choice during the instruction was not to provide the learners with rules of thumb (van Compernolle, 2014), thus encouraging agentive language use rather than language use based on prescriptive generalisations of perceived politeness and the interlocutor (Liddicoat and McConachy, 2019). Interestingly, although they were not provided with any rules, the learners realised requests differently depending on the interlocutor's familiarity and age, both in terms of directness levels and the strategies employed. This provides insights into the learners' pragmalinguistic navigation between sociopragmatic variables, in contrast to Savić (2015), who found that the learners' pragmalinguistic development was not accompanied by sociopragmatic development. Savić (2015) argues that similar results of resorting to L1 strategies in the L2 have been found with older Norwegian learners, suggesting that mere exposure is insufficient and more focused input is required in class. Consequently, the current study, albeit small-scale and with a relatively short duration, shows that drawing learners' attention to sociopragmatic dimensions of requesting may facilitate their ability to make informed choices when utilising their pragmalinguistic repertoire.

In sum, similar to findings by Taguchi and Kim (2016), the instruction had a longer-term impact on some of the pragmalinguistic resources introduced. In the present study, this included modal verbs, which Ishihara and Chiba (2014) also found with the oldest learners, and supportive moves. These findings show that the learners had broadened their pragmalinguistic repertoire, thus providing a foundation for agentive language use and making sociopragmatic choices. Adding to the limited pool of previous instructional pragmatics studies with young learners (Alemi and Haeri, 2020; Ishihara, 2013; Ishihara and Chiba, 2014; Taguchi and Kim, 2016), the results presented in this paper indicate that concept-based instruction facilitates young language learners' pragmalinguistic development. Moreover, considering that the duration of the instruction was relatively short and the learners still showed significant changes in their request strategies, there is no reason to delay pragmatics instruction until the learners are older and more proficient.

6. Conclusion

This paper has explored the impact of concept-based instruction with young Norwegian EFL learners focusing on requests produced in a pre-, post-, and delayed post-test. The study investigated both the broadening of the learners' pragmalinguistic repertoire and the changes in pragmalinguistic variation with interlocutors of different familiarity and age. The results show that the impact of instruction was robust longer-term with regard to some pragmalinguistic resources introduced during instruction. Contributing to the knowledge about pragmatics instruction with young L2 learners, this study provides empirical evidence from a previously uncharted group, namely Norwegian learners, as well as evidence about the affordances of concept-based approaches, previously only employed with adult learners. The findings suggest that even relatively short instruction periods may result in pragmatic development, and further investigation into young learners' development from instruction should be pursued. In addition, the learners' sociopragmatic development, demonstrated through their pragmalinguistic variation depending on familiarity and age, provides valuable insight into the potential of pragmatics instruction, while spontaneous learner comments reveal that the focus on scientific concepts and agency, rather than teaching rules of thumb, provides a foundation for mediating learner reflections about language use. As the learners' internalisation of concepts was not systematically investigated in the current study, this opens for opportunities for filling a knowledge gap in future studies with young learners, where learners are invited to provide their reasonings as part of production tasks. This study reveals that explicit input through SCT-informed concept-based approaches should indeed be pursued both in future studies and in language classrooms as it provides support for young learners to advance on paths towards agency.

Declaration of competing interest

The author declares that he has no conflicts of interest relevant to or that might compromise this research.

Appendix

Appendix A

An overview of the various scenarios, interlocutor, familiarity/age (as coded), and what was requested.

Video	Test	Scenario	Interlocutor	Familiarity	Request
Library	Pre, Post	Library	Friend	Friend	Play outside
		Library	Friend	Friend	Play outside in snow
		Playground	Friend	Friend	Build a snowman
Museum	Pre, Post	Outside school	Friend	Friend	Go to museum
		Street	Stranger	Unfamiliar	Directions
Phone call	Pre, Post	On the phone	Friend's parent	Unfamiliar	Speak to friend
		On the phone	Friend	Friend	Go outside and play
Fast food	Pre, Post	Counter	Sales assistant	Unfamiliar	Burger, fries, coke
		Counter	Sales assistant	Unfamiliar	Two cheeseburgers
		Counter	Sales assistant	Unfamiliar	Two cokes
Shopping	Pre, Post, **Del**	Market	Sales assistant	Unfamiliar	Doll
		Market	Sales assistant	Unfamiliar	Car
		Store	Parent	Familiar	Kite
		Store	Parent	Familiar	Hat
Classroom	Pre, Post, **Del**	Classroom	Friend	Friend	Crayon
		Classroom	Teacher	Familiar	Green paper
		Classroom	Teacher	Familiar	Orange paper
		Classroom	Friend	Friend	Yellow pencil
Dinner	Pre, Post, **Del**	At the table	Friend's parent	Unfamiliar	Fork
		At the table	Friend's parent	Unfamiliar	More soup
		At the table	Friend's parent	Unfamiliar	Ask to come back
Restaurant	Pre, Post, **Del**	Restaurant	Waiter	Unfamiliar	Green salad
		Restaurant	Parent	Familiar	Glass of water

Appendix B

Table B1
Use of internal modification strategies and alerters. Significant results are marked in bold.

		Test (raw frequencies)			Chi square test		z-test sig.		
		Pre-test	Post-test	Del. post	X^2	Sig.	Pre- Post	Post-Del	Pre- Del
Attention	Excuse me[a]	19	31	2	7.0170	.219	.244	.559	.294
		31.1%	43.7%	66.7%					
	Pardon me[a]	2	3	0			.781	.722	.754
		3.3%	4.2%	0.0%					
	Sorry[a]	1	6	1			.090	.170	**.002**
		1.6%	8.5%	33.3%					
	Hey	17	10	0			.081	.516	.361
		27.9%	14.1%	0.0%					
	Hello	13	14	0			.840	.442	.424
		21.3%	19.7%	0.0%					
	Hi	9	6	0			.284	.615	.506
		14.8%	8.5%	0.0%					
	Yo	0	1	0			.354	.837	–
		0.0%	1.4%	0.0%					
	Total	61	71	3					
		8.7%	8.0%	0.7%					
Downgraders	Maybe	13	5	4	11.2574	**.010**	**.006**	.603	.070
		10.0%	2.6%	3.7%					
	Perhaps[a]	0	3	1			.153	.643	.273
		0.0%	1.6%	0.9%					
	Possibly[a]	0	5	1			.065	.321	.273
		0.0%	2.6%	0.9%					
	Please	117	174	102			.919	.772	.722
		90.0%	91.1%	94.4%					
	Please + [b]	0	4	0			.099	.133	–

Table B1 (*continued*)

		Test (raw frequencies)			Chi square test		z-test sig.		
		Pre-test	Post-test	Del. post	X^2	Sig.	Pre- Post	Post-Del	Pre- Del
Address term		0.0%	2.1%	0.0%					
	Total	130	191	108					
		18.6%	22.0%	24.3%					
	First name	13	3	1	3.3637	.067	.083	.658	.095
		22.8%	7.9%	4.8%					
	Title/role[a]	15	11	3			.810	.268	.327
		26.3%	28.9%	14.3%					
	Mum/Dad	29	24	17			.432	.432	.125
		50.9%	63.2%	81.0%					
	Total	57	38	21					
		8.2%	4.0%	4.7%					

[a] Presented during instruction.

[b] 'Please +' indicates the use of *please* with another downgrader, *perhaps* (2) and *possibly* (2).

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