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EFL Learners' Production of Implicit Compliments

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In contrast to explicit compliments, only very few studies have addressed the pedagogical aspects of teaching implicit compliments in English to EFL learners. The present study, designed to help fill the gap, compared Korean EFL learners' pragmatic ability to produce implicit compliments with that to produce explicit compliments and examined proficiency dependent differences in their ability to produce implicit and explicit compliments, as well as two types of implicit compliments. A total of 45 participants, assigned to low, intermediate, and high proficiency groups, performed a pragmatic production task and took part in a post-task interview. Results showed that EFL learners performed significantly worse in producing implicit compliments than in producing explicit compliments, which was attributed to the unformulaic nature of implicit compliments. Concerning the impact of proficiency on EFL learners' ability to produce implicit compliments, it was importantly found that significant differences existed between any two groups of the three proficiency groups. Further, proficiency was revealed to differently affect EFL learners' production of two types of implicit compliments. In terms of pedagogical implications, the study suggests that the explicit teaching of implicit compliments to EFL learners taking into account proficiency levels should be seriously discussed.

[implicit compliments/explicit compliments/pragmatic ability/EFL learners/EFL proficiency levels]

I. INTRODUCTION

It is generally accepted that the more an EFL learner is familiar with speech acts in English, the higher EFL proficiency she/he is expected to acquire (Bachman, 1990; Canale, 1983; Canale & Swain, 1980). Pedagogically speaking, an EFL learner's proficiency would not be enhanced without adequate focus and emphasis on the development of her/his pragmatic competence. In this respect, it seems that teachers and researchers in input-poor

EFL contexts (Kouraogo, 1993) should find ways to help EFL learners gain sufficient understanding of speech acts in English (Kim, 1998; Suh, 2007; Yang, 2005). Among the speech acts, compliments have been most extensively researched (Rose, 2001) due to Manes and Wolfson's (1981) historic study which revealed the formulaic nature of explicit compliments in English. In contrast to the substantial body of research into explicit compliments, though, only recently did implicit compliments begin to attract serious attention (Boyle, 2000). The importance of Boyle's study appears to be underscored by the contributions implicit as well as explicit compliments make to the interactional processes (Laver, 1981, cited in Boyle, 2000) and the improvement of EFL learners' proficiency levels. Interestingly, though, even Boyle's study did not concern itself with how implicit compliments could be addressed pedagogically. It is hoped that the present study, which seeks to fill the gap by answering the following questions, will suggest insightful implications for the pedagogy of implicit compliments in EFL contexts.

1. Does EFL learners' pragmatic ability to produce implicit compliments differ from that to produce explicit compliments?
2. Does proficiency affect EFL learners' pragmatic ability to produce implicit and explicit compliments, as well as different types of implicit compliments?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Since Manes and Wolfson reported the results of their groundbreaking study on English explicit compliments in 1981, a considerable number of interesting studies have been conducted on the subject. Specifically, the impact of Manes and Wolfson's finding, which shows that over half of the explicit compliments offered in the interactions among middle-class Americans utilized a single syntactic pattern, was immeasurable and numerous studies have been carried out in different settings (Chick, 1996; Cordella, Large & Pardo, 1995; Farghal & Al-Khatib, 2001; Herbert, 1989, 1991, 1997; Herbert & Straight, 1989; Holmes, 1988; Holmes & Brown, 1987; Jaworski, 1995; Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, 1989; Nelson, Al-Batal, & Echols, 1996; Ylanne-McEwen, 1993). Through these studies, the formulaicness of explicit compliments argued by Manes and Wolfson has been validated. According to Manes and Wolfson (1981) and Wolfson (1989), the formulaic nature of explicit compliments can be attributed to the fact that unambiguous compliments can be conducive to fostering feelings of closeness among interactants who do not know each other well.

What has been less emphasized, though, is that compliments are also capable of presenting the addressee with the problem of balancing the need to be appreciative of the

speaker with the need to prevent self-commendation (Pomerantz, 1978). In addition, the addressee could be left feeling uncomfortable as the result of being complimented and perceiving compliments as threatening her/his negative face (Bruti, 2006). These potential predicaments could be avoided by paying implicit compliments that do not appear to be compliments on the surface level (Bruti, 2006).

As an example of implicit compliments, Bruti (2006) provided an excerpt as follows from the script of an American movie, *Tootsie*.

Julie: Well, the baby and I are gonna go up to my dad's farm upstate. It's not exactly the fast lane, but it's kind of fun. Maybe you'd like to come along? You know, since my dad met you he's your biggest fan.

Regarding the underlined part in the excerpt, Bruti asserted that it is an implicit compliment to the addressee although it seems more focused on the speaker's father than on the addressee. Bruti explained that the addressee is implicitly complimented because the addressee and the speaker share the knowledge that a fan of someone admires or idolizes her/him. The researcher argued that the interpersonal and contextual knowledge shared by interlocutors allows the addressee to realize that she/he is being complimented. This form of using less formulaic (more indirect) language reflects the sincere attention given by the speaker to complimenting the addressee and could contribute to strengthening relationships between the interlocutors (Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, 1989, cited in Bruti, 2006).

Despite the important role implicit compliments can play in the area of pragmatics, however, the speech act has drawn little attention from researchers. Boyle (2000) claimed that there were two obvious reasons for the scant interest in implicit compliments. The first reason was that researchers were focused only on brief, unambiguous, and easily memorizable expressions. The second reason was that many researchers had the tendency to adhere to a limited view of the phatic function, i.e., creating and sustaining rapport (Kordon, 2006), of compliments. Namely, researchers held to the restricted view that complimenting is the facet of phatic communion that strengthens social cohesiveness. Laver (1981, cited in Boyle, 2000) maintained that the most important function of compliments was to prevent the possible uneasiness and antagonism caused by silence in interactions. Stressing that this limited view was responsible for the bias in favor of explicit compliments, Boyle turned his attention to the less emphasized exploratory function of the phatic function. The exploratory function was asserted to enable interactants to use conversational maxims in order to negotiate a change in their interactions, generally toward a higher level of attachment or detachment (Laver, 1981, cited in Boyle, 2000). Boyle proposed two types of implicit compliments: implicit compliments that mention the complimentee's accomplishments and implicit compliments that liken the complimentee to

an individual whom the speaker holds in high esteem. He claimed that the two types both presuppose the presence of a substantial amount of indexical knowledge and reciprocity of perspectives as the condition for compliments to be received as compliments.

In terms of distance of interlocutors, Boyle put more of his focus on the giving and receiving of implicit compliments between those who are not close to each other, unlike Bruti (2006) who discussed implicit compliments using the interactions occurring mostly between those who are friendly to each other. Boyle contended that more insight into implicit compliments could be gained from public interactions between professional colleagues or those mostly unknown to each other. In this connection, it was claimed that implicit compliments were given most frequently in genres including the celebrity interview, which, Boyle noted, verified Wolfson's (1989) 'bulge theory'. Boyle maintained that the 'bulge theory' made it clear that compliments are exchanged between the interlocutors who are not familiar with each other since they stand a greater chance of negotiation than the interactants who are already familiar with each other. Boyle meticulously described and explained the theoretical background to his study, and logically analyzed and interpreted his data. Thus, Boyle's study has important implications for those interested in implicit compliments. Boyle's study does not suggest any pedagogical implications, however.

This oversight is surprising in that the pedagogy of implicit compliments should be discussed due to their unformulaic nature. In order to begin to address in earnest the teaching of implicit compliments in EFL settings, it appears clear that a study should be carried out to examine EFL learners' performance on tasks designed to measure their pragmatic competence (Bachman, 1990; Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Canale & Swain, 1980) to be able to produce implicit compliments. In particular, it seems that the study should look into EFL learners' ability to produce both implicit and explicit compliments because the possible differences in task performance between implicit and explicit compliments could highlight the pedagogical importance of the long overlooked area of implicit compliments. Further, it appears that the study needs to investigate whether EFL learners would perform differently with the two types of implicit compliments mentioned earlier, i.e., implicit compliments given in public interactions between professional colleagues or those largely unknown to each other and implicit compliments given in private interactions between those who are close to each other (Boyle, 2000). In doing so, the study could produce results that indicate more focused approaches to the pedagogy of implicit compliments. Also, given that the teaching of implicit compliments could be best addressed when considered from the perspectives of pragmatic development and pragmatic teachability (Kasper, 2001), it would be better for the study to examine the impact of proficiency on EFL learners' pragmatic ability to produce implicit and explicit compliments, as well as two types of implicit compliments. The present investigation,

conducted to fill the empirical gap, is expected to provide the point of departure for suggesting pedagogically beneficial directions based on the findings that could be cautiously interpreted as the diagnosis of EFL learners' pragmatic ability to produce implicit compliments.

III. METHOD

1. Participants

Participants in the present study were 45 EFL learners (24 females and 21 males) from four universities located in Seoul, Korea, majoring in Politics, History, Economics, and Civil Engineering. The reason that participants were from different universities was that there had been concern that the number of participants might be small if enlisted from a single university. Participants' ages ranged from 19 to 25. They were assigned in equal numbers, 15, to the high, intermediate, or low proficiency group. As the first criterion for assigning them to different proficiency groups, their TOEIC scores were used. Specifically, participants whose TOEIC scores were above 535 points, the mean total score for TOEIC test takers in Korea (TOEIC Report on Test Takers Worldwide 2005), were divided from those whose TOEIC scores were below 535 points. Out of those above 535 points, participants whose scores were in the range of 700-990 were assigned to the high proficiency group (Kim & Dammers, 2008) while the rest were assigned to the intermediate proficiency group. All participants below the score of 535 were assigned to the low proficiency group.

The second criterion was native English speaking lecturers' impressionistic assessments of participants' proficiency. The reason for using the criterion was that the native English speakers' assessments of participants' in-class interactions with them could be cautiously interpreted as the appropriate evaluations of their sociolinguistic proficiency. Each native English speaking lecturer was requested to evaluate each of her/his students' proficiency by assigning a single numerical score from 1 (very weak) to 5 (very good). The lecturers' assessments were mostly consistent with participants' TOEIC scores (Lee & Park, 2003).

Lastly, participants' self-evaluations of their proficiency (Ellis, 2003), which in most cases matched the native English speakers' assessments, was used as the criterion. In particular, participants were asked to self-assess their proficiency by choosing one of five options, ranging from very weak to very good, to nine questions on the questionnaire developed by Llurda and Huguet (2003). In the few cases where a participant's scores were similar for only two criteria, she/he was assigned to a proficiency group according to the scores for the two criteria.

2. Instruments

The participants' pragmatic ability to produce implicit and explicit compliments was assessed by a pragmatic production task (Hill, 1997; House, 1996; Pair, 1996; Rose, 2000; Sasaki, 1998). The task, comprised of 10 multiple choice questions (Liu, 2007), was expected to have a high degree of task authenticity because it required participants to listen to interactions between two native English speakers before giving answers to the multiple choice questions (Taguchi, 2005). The dialogues for the five questions designed to measure participants' production of implicit compliments were excerpted from either conversations from American or British movies including *Sabrina* (Bruti, 2006) or scripts for celebrity interviews broadcast on a British radio station (Boyle, 2000) (see Appendix). The dialogues for the five questions constructed to measure participants' production of explicit compliments were written by the author after consulting the study by Wolfson (1981) and reviewed and modified by two native English speaking lecturers at Korean universities. The answer options to the 10 questions, excluding the correct answers, were also written by the author and reviewed and modified by the two lecturers. In order to determine whether further modifications were necessary for the main study, a pilot test was administered to four EFL students who were not participants in the main study. For the purpose of examining the effect of the lower proficiency participants' possible inability to comprehend the reading passages on their production of explicit and implicit compliments, the author requested the participants immediately before the test to read the passages and then asked them whether they had any difficulty comprehending the passages. Most of the lower proficiency participants responded that they had not trouble understanding the passages.

In addition to the pragmatic production task, a semi-structured interview with participants was conducted for approximately 10 minutes per person in Korean. The interview questions were mainly centered around why they chose certain options.

3. Procedures

Before undertaking the study in mid-May 2008, the author contacted several English lecturers at Korean universities whom he has known personally. He succeeded in eliciting their cooperation and obtained the names of 60 prospective participants who had taken TOEIC. He then called each of them to request them to volunteer for the study. Out of the 60 students, 45 agreed to participate in the study. On the appointed date, the 45 students gathered together to perform the pragmatic production task and take part in the post-task interview. After briefly instructing participants on how to perform the pragmatic task including explaining the definitions of explicit and implicit compliments and checking

their comprehension of the definitions, the author distributed to them answer sheets on which the questions and options were printed in English. Participants engaged in the task by listening twice to the dialogues recorded by two native English speakers and choosing and marking one of five options. After their task performance was completed, the author interviewed them one by one in a semi-structured way. The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and translated into English for reporting.

4. Data Analysis

Participants' scores on the pragmatic production task were analyzed using mainly two different statistical procedures. First, in order to examine differences in scores between the item categories of implicit and explicit compliments, a paired-samples t-test was employed. Second, to investigate intergroup differences in scores on the item categories of implicit and explicit compliments, a one-way ANOVA was run.

Additionally, the transcribed semi-structured interviews were analyzed to complement the quantitative findings. It was found that the answers to some questions were very similar across proficiency level while the answers to some questions were almost identical across the members of each proficiency group. Thus, it was decided that the representative answers would be used together with other data in reporting the results of the study.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. EFL Learners' Pragmatic Ability to Produce Implicit and Explicit Compliments

As shown in Table 1, participants' scores on the items that measured their pragmatic ability to produce implicit compliments were lower than those on the items that measured their pragmatic ability to produce explicit compliments.

TABLE 1

Descriptive Statistics for Participants' Scores on the Item Categories of Implicit and Explicit Compliments

	N	K	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
EXP	45	5	4	5	4.82	.387
IMP	45	5	0	3	1.67	1.022

Note. EXP = explicit compliments; IMP = implicit compliments. K denotes the number of items in each category. One point was assigned per correct answer. The highest possible score in each category was 5.

This score difference, found to be statistically significant (see Table 2), was attributed to the formulaicness of explicit compliments which allows learners to use a relatively limited range of language resources to encode and decode them. In other words, participants earned significantly higher scores on the item category of explicit compliments than on the item category of implicit compliments because they had only to rely on a restricted number of syntactic patterns and vocabulary words (Bruti, 2006) when trying to give correct answers to items related to explicit compliments.

TABLE 2
The Difference in Participants' Scores between the Item Categories of Implicit and Explicit Compliments

	Paired Differences							
				95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1 EXP-IMP	3.16	.878	.131	2.89	3.42	24.112	44	.000

Note. EXP = explicit compliments; IMP = implicit compliments.

In contrast to the formulaicness of explicit compliments, implicit compliments have been claimed to require learners to employ unformulaic language (Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk 1989, cited in Bruti, 2006) or non-routine language (Bruti, 2006) which reduces their possibility of successfully producing implicit compliments (Thomas, 1995). Participants in this study also found themselves having difficulty accessing the resources needed for successful production of implicit compliments. A participant in the high proficiency group reported as follows on behalf of other participants.

(1) Report (High proficiency participant #6)
The questions on implicit compliments were much harder than those on explicit compliments. You see, when you want to pay your interlocutor an implicit compliment, you can hardly use such easy and familiar expressions as 'Wow, that was great!' or 'Good job!'. No, you definitely need more indirect expressions than them. That's why I decided to do some hard thinking when the questions in the second part of the task asked me to choose the best implicit compliments. Really, I tried very hard to come up with the best implicit compliments, unlike in the case of explicit compliments.

As is clear from (1), participants approached the questions on implicit compliments differently from those on explicit compliments. They adopted a more cautious attitude

toward implicit compliments than toward explicit compliments and strived to activate their available pragmatic resources to give the correct answers. Despite their strenuous efforts, however, the score on the item category of implicit compliments was lower than that on the item category of explicit compliments within each of the three proficiency groups (see Table 3).

TABLE 3

Descriptive Statistics for Scores on the Item Categories of Implicit and Explicit Compliments within Each Proficiency Group

Group		K	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
High	EXP	5	5	5	5.00	.000
(*n*=15)	IMP	5	2	3	2.80	.414
Intermediate	EXP	5	4	5	4.87	.352
(*n*=15)	IMP	5	1	2	1.60	.507
Low	EXP	5	4	5	4.60	.507
(*n*=15)	IMP	5	0	1	.60	.507

Note. EXP = explicit compliments; IMP = implicit compliments. K denotes the number of items in each category. One point was assigned per correct answer. The highest possible score in each category was 5.

In addition to the significant score differences (see Table 4), Table 3 presents the relatively large variations (i.e., standard deviations) in score on the item category of implicit compliments compared to the item category of explicit compliments within high and intermediate proficiency groups. The gaps within the two groups show that participants in the two groups performed less uniformly in producing implicit compliments than in producing explicit compliments. With respect to low proficiency participants, Table 3 displays that there is no difference in standard deviations in scores on the item category of implicit compliments and the item category of explicit compliments. The standard deviations, though, are clearly larger than those for the high proficiency group and larger than or the same as those for the intermediate proficiency group. These differences in standard deviations reflect that low proficiency participants performed in a less uniform way than high or intermediate proficiency participants.

TABLE 4
Differences in Scores between the Item Categories of Implicit and Explicit Compliments within Each Proficiency Group

		Paired Differences							
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Group									
High (n=15)	Pair 1 EXP-IMP	2.20	.414	.107	1.97	2.43	20.579	14	.000
Intermediate (n=15)	Pair 1 EXP-IMP	3.27	.458	.118	3.01	3.52	27.640	14	.000
Low (n=15)	Pair 1 EXP-IMP	4.00	.535	.138	3.70	4.30	28.983	14	.000

Note. EXP = explicit compliments; IMP = implicit compliments.

2. The Influence of Proficiency on EFL Learners' Pragmatic Ability to Produce Implicit and Explicit Compliments, as Well as Two Types of Implicit Compliments

Intergroup differences in scores on the item categories of implicit and explicit compliments were found to be significant (see Tables 5 and 6). The score differences suggest that proficiency, operationalized in this study as the combination of TOEIC scores, native English speaking lecturers' impressionistic evaluations, and self-evaluations, affected participants' ability to produce implicit and explicit compliments to a substantial degree (Churchill, 2000; DuFon, 2001; Roever, 2001; Rose, 2000). In particular, it seems that the finding on the significant effect of proficiency on participants' production of implicit compliments could be seen as consistent with the outcome in a study by Taguchi (2005) which identified proficiency as a predictor for pragmatic knowledge relating to indirect speech acts.

TABLE 5
Intergroup Differences in Scores on the Item Category of Implicit Compliments

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	36.400	2	18.200	79.625	.000
Within Groups	9.600	42	.229		
Total	46.000	44			

TABLE 6

Intergroup Differences in Scores on the Item Category of Explicit Compliments

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1.244	2	.622	4.900	.012
Within Groups	5.333	42	.127		
Total	6.578	44			

As was discussed in the previous subsection, all three groups' performance in producing implicit compliments was significantly poorer than that in producing explicit compliments. Along with the within-group differences between production of implicit and explicit compliments, the intergroup differences in the ability to produce implicit compliments imply that the teaching of implicit compliments taking into account proficiency levels should be discussed. The pedagogical need to allow for proficiency levels is further underscored by the presence of significant score differences between any two groups (i.e., high and intermediate proficiency groups, intermediate and low proficiency groups, and low and high proficiency groups), as shown in Table 7. The significant differences obtained from post hoc multiple comparisons in One-Way ANOVA seem to reflect that proficiency should be taken into full pedagogical consideration in connection with discussing the teaching of implicit compliments to EFL learners.

TABLE 7

Differences in Scores on the Item Category of Implicit Compliments between Two Groups

		Mean Difference			95% Confidence Interval	
(1)Group	(2)Group	(I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
High	Intermediate	1.20*	.175	.000	.76	1.64
	Low	2.20*	.175	.000	1.76	2.64
Intermediate	High	-1.20*	.175	.000	-1.64	-.76
	Low	1.00*	.175	.000	.56	1.44
Low	High	-2.20*	.175	.000	-2.64	-1.76
	Intermediate	-1.00*	.175	.000	-1.44	-.56

In contrast to the case of implicit compliments, in terms of performance in producing explicit compliments a statistically significant difference was found only between high and low proficiency groups (see Table 8). This gap between implicit and explicit compliments appears to indicate that EFL proficiency had a stronger effect on participants' pragmatic knowledge relating to implicit compliments than on the pragmatic knowledge relating to explicit compliments.

TABLE 8

Differences in Scores on the Item Category of Explicit Compliments between Two Groups

		Mean Difference			95% Confidence Interval	
(1)Group	(2)Group	(I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
High	Intermediate	.13	.130	.595	-.20	.46
	Low	.40*	.130	.014	.07	.73
Intermediate	High	-.13	.130	.595	-.46	.20
	Low	.27	.130	.135	-.06	.60
Low	High	-.40*	.130	.014	-.73	-.07
	Intermediate	-.27	.130	.135	-.60	.06

The reports in the post-task interview by participants at different proficiency levels mainly corroborated the findings from the statistical analyses; that is, the lower their EFL proficiency, the more difficulty they had giving correct answers to items on implicit compliments or explicit compliments. What was noteworthy about participants' interview reports was that there existed differences in the awareness of, attitudes toward, and knowledge of implicit compliments depending on proficiency level, despite their shared experience of not having learned implicit compliments at school. The following are what a high proficiency, an intermediate proficiency, and a low proficiency participants reported for other participants in their respective proficiency groups.

(2) Report (High proficiency participant #13)

Definitely, my English teachers or professors have not taught me implicit compliments. Nevertheless, I think I have known of implicit compliments. You see, I have watched American or British movies and tv programs to develop my communicative abilities. While studying English through the movies or TV programs, I have been gradually enabled to identify the utterances that at first don't sound like compliments, yet are in fact compliments expressed in an indirect way. But I haven't paid much attention to implicit compliments because no one has told me that it would be better for me to learn to use them in addition to explicit compliments. And the test on implicit compliments I took today did help me appreciate the importance of implicit compliments and how limited my knowledge of them actually was. Specifically, whereas I'm sure of my knowledge to determine whether certain utterances are implicit compliments, I'm not so sure of my knowledge to produce implicit compliments in certain situations.

(3) Report (Intermediate proficiency participant #4)
All of my English teachers and professors have not even mentioned the term 'implicit compliments', let alone taught them. And I'm afraid I haven't been well aware of them. Certainly, I have watched some American movies. Yet, I have been so busy learning how native English speakers interact in real-life situations using explicit compliments, requests, and apologies. As a result, I haven't been able to raise my awareness of implicit compliments. I think that learning implicit compliments can be important for my English study. Regarding the knowledge needed to both decide whether particular utterances are implicit compliments and produce implicit compliments, I am not very confident.

(4) Report (Low proficiency participant #9)
I have never heard of implicit compliments in English. I can't remember ever having been taught about implicit compliments in school. Besides the paucity of teaching, my low English proficiency hasn't allowed me to notice about implicit compliments. As for me, it seems that I need to consolidate my knowledge of explicit compliments before moving on to implicit compliments. As to the knowledge required to comprehend and produce implicit compliments, I am in much doubt.

As are evident in (2), (3), and (4), only high proficiency participants developed any awareness of implicit compliments in the absence of the teaching of the speech act. Participants in the intermediate proficiency group had been focused on acquiring basic communicative competence in English and unable to have any awareness of implicit compliments, while participants in the low proficiency group considered themselves not even ready to learn implicit compliments. These differences in the awareness of implicit compliments (Garcia, 2004) seem to be related to the differences in the attitude toward and perceived knowledge of implicit compliments; namely, the more the awareness of implicit compliments, the more appreciative of the importance of implicit compliments and the stronger the perceived knowledge of implicit compliments. What draws our attention in relation to participants' perceived knowledge of implicit compliments is that high proficiency participants' knowledge needed to comprehend implicit compliments did not match the knowledge needed to produce implicit compliments. It appears that the close relationship between pragmatic awareness and pragmatic comprehension (Garcia, 2004) of implicit compliments could not be extended to pragmatic production of implicit compliments.

Concerning high proficiency participants' difficulty with the production of implicit compliments, Table 9 shows that they failed to give correct answers to either of the two items asking them to choose the best implicit compliments required in interactions between

interviewers and celebrity interviewees. Not surprisingly, intermediate and low proficiency participants also scored zero on the two items. In contrast to the failure across proficiency groups to produce any implicit compliments required in public interactions between professional colleagues or those not close to each other, there existed significant proficiency dependent differences in participants' ability to produce implicit compliments needed in private interactions between those who are close to each other. The significant differences were the same as those found for overall implicit compliments (see Tables 6 and 7 provided earlier) because all participants received a score of zero on items on implicit compliments needed in public interactions.

TABLE 9

Descriptive Statistics for Group Performance in Producing Implicit Compliments Required in Public and Private Interactions

Group	Type	K	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
High	Public IMP	2	0	0	.00	.000
(*n*=15)	Private IMP	3	2	3	2.80	.414
Intermediate	Public IMP	2	0	0	.00	.000
(*n*=15)	Private IMP	3	1	2	1.60	.507
Low	Public IMP	2	0	0	.00	.000
(*n*=15)	Private IMP	3	0	1	.60	.507

Note. Public IMP = implicit compliments required in public interactions between professional colleagues or those who are not close to each other; Private IMP = implicit compliments required in private interactions between those who are friendly to each other. K denotes the number of items in the categories of Public IMP and Private IMP. One point was assigned per correct answer. The highest possible score in each category was 2 (Public IMP) and 3 (Private IMP).

Findings on participants' performance in producing two types of implicit compliments, i.e., implicit compliments given in public interactions between professional colleagues or those largely unknown to each other and implicit compliments given in private interactions between those who are close to each other (Boyle, 2000), seem to suggest an important pedagogical direction in connection with pragmatic development and pragmatic teachability. In other words, pedagogical contents should be determined taking into account how ready learners at a certain proficiency level are to learn implicit compliments. It appears that high proficiency learners could benefit from engaging in tasks designed to develop their ability to produce implicit compliments required in public interactions, while intermediate proficiency learners could profit from participating in tasks constructed to increase the knowledge which is needed to produce implicit compliments required in private interactions before being introduced to implicit compliments required in public

interactions. As for low proficiency learners, it seems that pedagogical attention should be directed towards how to strengthen their ability to produce explicit compliments prior to raising their awareness of implicit compliments.

V. CONCLUSION

The present study was aimed at investigating EFL learners' production of implicit compliments and the influence of EFL proficiency on their production of implicit compliments mainly through comparing their production of implicit and explicit compliments. A total of 45 Korean university students, assigned to low, intermediate, and high proficiency groups, participated in the study. The students were asked to perform a pragmatic production task, comprised of 10 multiple choice questions, by listening to dialogues and choosing the best implicit or explicit compliments. After completing the task, they were interviewed in a semi-structured way by the author.

Results showed that EFL learners performed significantly worse in producing implicit compliments than in producing explicit compliments. The performance difference was attributed to the unformulaic nature of implicit compliments that did not allow the learners to use only a limited range of resources in encoding them, in contrast to the formulaic nature of explicit compliments. With respect to the impact of EFL proficiency, the intergroup differences in the ability to produce implicit and explicit compliments were found to be significant. Importantly, in relation to the intergroup difference in the production of implicit compliments, it was further revealed that significant differences existed between any two groups (i.e., high and intermediate proficiency groups, intermediate and low proficiency groups, and low and high proficiency groups). Additionally, proficiency was found to differently affect EFL learners' production of two types of implicit compliments**,** i.e., implicit compliments given in public interactions between professional colleagues or those mostly unknown to each other and implicit compliments given in private interactions between those who are close to each other. Specifically, learners at different proficiency levels all failed to produce any of the implicit compliments required in public interactions while performing significantly differently depending on proficiency level in producing implicit compliments required in private interactions.

In terms of pedagogical implications, the present study proposes two suggestions. First, discussions about the explicit teaching of implicit compliments to EFL learners should be initiated. The need for discussing the explicit teaching of implicit compliments appears to be justified by the finding from the present investigation that even high proficiency learners failed to produce implicit compliments necessary in certain interactional situations.

Without explicit pedagogy, the systematic development of EFL learners' pragmatic knowledge relating to the speech act of implicit compliments seems unachievable. Second, in connection with the first suggestion, different approaches depending on proficiency level should be discussed when addressing the teaching of implicit compliments. Given that EFL learners' performance in producing implicit compliments was found to differ significantly according to EFL proficiency in the present study, adequate attention should be directed toward proficiency in relation to the pedagogical discussion of implicit compliments.

The present study is admittedly open to criticism and improvement in many respects, including the limited number of participants. Despite the limitations, though, a suggestion is to be made for future research; the conduct of longitudinal studies designed to examine the teachability of implicit compliments in EFL classrooms**.** Over the last ten years, interesting findings and implications have been reported in terms of the teachability of pragmatic knowledge in classrooms (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001; Golato, 2003; Matsuda, 1999; Rose & Kasper, 2001), and the pedagogy of pragmatics has been claimed to be essential and crucial (Eslami-Rasekh, 2005). Considering that the classroom teaching of implicit compliments over an extended period of time has not been explored, such longitudinal studies will complement cross-sectional studies such as the present one and contribute to the construction of effective pedagogical programs for the teaching of implicit compliments.

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APPENDIX

Pragmatic Production Questions

Questions 1 through 5

Listen carefully to the dialogue and choose, from among the five answers, the best explicit compliment.

Question 1
A: Hey, where are you going?
B: I'm going on a bike ride. I bought this bike yesterday.
A: _____.

Circle the best explicit compliment to fill in the blank above.

1. That's a nice-looking bike.
2. I envy you for your new bike.
3. I wish I had a bike like yours.
4. How much did you pay for the bike?
5. You must be proud of your new bike.

Question 2
A: Thank you for the wonderful dinner.
B: Oh, don't mention it.
A: _____.

Circle the best explicit compliment to fill in the blank above.

1. Please teach me how to prepare such a wonderful dinner.
2. You're such a good cook.
3. Did someone teach you how to cook good meal?
4. How did you find time to prepare the dinner?
5. I'll never forget the dinner I had tonight.

Question 3
A: What's that?
B: Oh, it's a picture of my baby girl.
A: _____.

Circle the best explicit compliment to fill in the blank above.

1. How old is she?
2. You have such a beautiful baby.
3. I wish I had a baby like her!
4. How could you leave her at home and work here?
5. You're in such luck.

Question 4
A: So, this is your new apartment.
B: Yes. We moved in last month.
A: _____.

Circle the best explicit compliment to fill in the blank above.

1. It looks great.
2. You must have paid lots of money for it.
3. You're in luck to live in a place like this.
4. How large is it?
5. I wish I had an apartment like yours.

Question 5
A: Where did you buy the dress you're wearing now?
B: At a shop in downtown.
A: _____.

Circle the best explicit compliment to fill in the blank above.

1. Can you give me the number of the shop?
2. Well, I guess it's a designer dress.
3. You have an eye for dress.
4. I wonder if the store has the dress in stock.
5. Well, I love your dress.

Listen carefully to the dialogue and choose, from among the five answers, the best implicit compliment.

Question 1
A: Have you always lived here?
B: Most of my life.
A: _____.

Circle the best implicit compliment to fill in the blank above.

1. Well, you are so pretty.
2. What can I say? You are just too beautiful.
3. I've never seen anyone as beautiful as you.
4. I'd swear I know every pretty girl on the North Shore.
5. Your beauty is indescribable.

Question 2
A: What are you doing for the holidays?
B: Why?
A: Well, the baby and I are gonna go up to my dad's farm upstate. It's not exactly the fast lane, but it's kind of fun. Maybe you'd like to come along? _____.

Circle the best implicit compliment to fill in the blank above.

1. My dad thinks you are wonderful.
2. Actually, my dad thinks you are terrific.
3. You know, since my dad met you, he's your biggest fan.
4. My guess is that my dad is attracted to you.
5. I'm sure he likes you.

Question 3
A: How do you say in French, my sister had a yellow pencil?
B: Ma soeur a un crayon jaune.
A: How do you say, my brother has a lovely girl?
B: Mon frère a une gentille petite amie.
A: _____.

Circle the best implicit compliment to fill in the blank above.

1. And how do you say, that lovely girl is you?
2. And how do you say, I wish I were my brother?
3. And how do you say, I love the lovely girl?
4. Then, what's the French for 'I love her'?
5. Then, how do you say, I love my brother's girlfriend?

Question 4

A: And you really think that's why it didn't actually make it to the shops?

B: I know why. I know that's why, yes.

A: Gosh, mm.

B: Yes, but, I'm terribly philosophical about it and I say "Well, so what?" That doesn't matter. You know, hopefully, we'll get to a world where...so long as you can sing. And it's a good song. That's all that matters.

A: Well, yah, boo sucks to them, anyway because _____.

Circle the best implicit compliment to fill in the blank above.

1. you are such a great actor.
2. you've worked with Elizabeth Taylor.
3. everyone loves your movies.
4. you've worked with beautiful actresses.
5. well, just ignore those idiots.

Question 5

A: Lovely arrangements on the album though. There's something that I hadn't really spotted before in you that comes out on this album. _____. Is that deliberate?

B: No, it's not deliberate but I have heard that before. I guess it would be, you know that tone of my voice and maybe the vibrato. But, you know I take it as a big compliment.

A: Well, that's nice phew! I thought you might be worried about it.

Circle the best implicit compliment to fill in the blank above.

1. And I like it a lot
2. Why the change? I mean you sound wonderful, but I am just curious.
3. I think it's such a beautiful transformation. I love it, although I wonder.

4. And that's something I never expected, though you are awesome here.
5. There's something Karen Carpentish about your voice on this album.

Examples in: English
Applicable Languages: English
Applicable Levels: Secondary and Tertiary

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