When Watching is not Enough: The Effects of Captions on L2 Pragmatics Acquisition and Awareness

Cuando visionar no es suficiente: el efecto de los subtítulos en la adquisición de la pragmática y la conciencia pragmática de la segunda lengua

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The present study explores the possible effects of captions to enhance second language pragmatics acquisition and awareness when watching TV series. Twenty-eight undergraduate English as a Foreign Language (levels B2 to C1) learners who volunteered for the study were assigned to two groups (captioned/non-captioned conditions). The participants were exposed to one season of a TV sitcom as part of out-of-class activities and not as a task in the classroom; neither of the groups had received instruction on pragmatics in class. To test the acquisition of the second language pragmatics (requests and suggestions), a written discourse completion test was used following a pre/post-test design. Results show an overall positive effect of the audiovisual support on the use of some of the request and suggestion strategies and on certain aspects of pragmatic awareness. However, there was no clear effect of captions versus the non-captioned condition. Findings are discussed considering previous studies in foreign language contexts.

Keywords: *L2 pragmatic acquisition; L2 pragmatic awareness; captions; EFL; out-of-class activity*

El presente estudio explora los efectos de los subtítulos para potenciar la adquisición de la pragmática y la conciencia pragmática de la segunda lengua al visionar series de televisión. Veintiocho estudiantes voluntarios, universitarios de inglés como lengua extranjera con niveles B2 a C1, fueron asignados a dos grupos (con y sin subtítulos). Los participantes vieron una temporada de una serie televisiva como parte de sus actividades fuera de clase y no como una tarea en el aula; ninguno de los grupos había recibido instrucción sobre pragmática en clase. Para valorar la adquisición de la pragmática de la segunda lengua (solicitudes y sugerencias), se utilizó una prueba escrita de compleción de discurso siguiendo un diseño de pre/ post- prueba. Los resultados muestran un efecto positivo del apoyo audiovisual en el uso de algunas estrategias de solicitud y sugerencia y en ciertos aspectos de la conciencia pragmática. Sin embargo, no hubo un efecto claro de los subtítulos versus la condición sin subtítulos. Los resultados se discuten a la luz de estudios previos en contextos de lengua extranjera.

Palabras clave: *adquisición de la pragmática de la L2; conciencia pragmática de la L2; subtítulos; inglés como lengua extranjera; actividad fuera del aula*

1. INTRODUCTION

The field of second language (L2) pragmatics (or Interlanguage Pragmatics, ILP) analyzes "how learners come to know how-to-say-what-to-whom-when" (Bardovi-Harlig, 2013: 68-69). It follows, therefore, that being competent in an L2 does not only imply being grammatically competent but also pragmatically competent (see, for instance, Krisnawati, 2011). This has thus created the need to explore the value of the acquisition of pragmatics in second language (SL) learning (Li, 2013; Takkaç Tulgar, 2016) and the effects of pragmatic instruction, especially in foreign language (FL) contexts where learners have limited opportunities to interact in the L2 as compared to SL contexts (see House & Kasper, 1981; Rose & Kwai-fun, 2001; Martínez-Flor, 2004; Taguchi, 2015, to name but a few). However, L2 pragmatic competence continues to be overlooked in such contexts due to time and methodological constraints and also lack of genuine situations (see Barón, Celaya & Levkina, 2020) and formal assessment (Taguchi & Roever, 2017), even if some recent studies show a change taking place in this sense (see, for instance, Taguchi & Kim, 2018; González-Lloret, 2019). Because of the similarities between fictional and real conversations (Bruti, 2016), the use of authentic audiovisual input in the classroom has received substantial attention in research, as seen in Alcón and Pitarch (2010), Abrams (2014) and Pujadas and Muñoz (2020), among others. Results from such previous studies in the classroom are still contradictory due to differences in the levels of competence and areas of language analyzed. Nevertheless, to the best of our knowledge, the benefits from being exposed to audiovisual input out of the classroom, more specifically, on the possible impact of input with and without captioned support is still an issue in need of research (see, however, Khazdouzian, Barón & Celaya, 2019).

The present study aims to shed light on this gap in the literature through the analysis of the acquisition of the L2 pragmatics and pragmatic awareness through the analysis of two speech acts in a sitcom that participants watched as an out-of-class activity. The speech acts of requests and suggestions were chosen as the focus of investigation because they have been extensively studied in the literature on ILP (see Gilabert & Barón, 2013), but not so much in relation to the effects of captioned and non-captioned audiovisual material and less so in relation to the acquisition of ILP as an out-of-class activity with no pragmatic instruction. This paper presents an overview of studies on the effect of instruction on the acquisition and awareness of the L2 pragmatics in FL contexts, on the one hand, and the effects of captioned audiovisual input, on the other (Section 2). The design of the study, the participants, instruments and measures are explained in Section 3. This section is followed by the results and the discussion of the findings and conclusions in Sections 4, 5 and 6, respectively.

2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1 *Pragmatics in FL contexts: Instruction and awareness*

Teaching the L2 pragmatics has traditionally been overlooked in the L2 classroom as compared to areas such as grammar or vocabulary (see Barón et al., 2020). It has generally been claimed that since instructors have limited time and a controlled syllabus, there is little opportunity for intercultural teaching (Rose, 1999); moreover, as Alcón and Safont (2001) stated, the type of input provided in pedagogical materials does not seem to enhance L2 pragmatic learning, since they usually consist of a list of linguistic forms. Even when naturalistic input is available, certain pragmatic features may not be adequately salient for learners to notice (Schmidt, 1993) and so their pragmatic awareness is not usually activated. More recently, the incorporation of pragmatic tasks in task-based teaching approaches (see González-Lloret, 2019 for a review) as

well as the use of technology to create diverse virtual environments (see Taguchi & Roever, 2017) have shown the benefits of such practices for the acquisition of the L2 pragmatics. The brief review that follows first presents some studies on the benefits of different types of instruction on pragmatics in general and then focuses on findings in the speech acts of requests and suggestions; finally, the relationship between instruction and pragmatic awareness is also addressed.

One of the earliest studies showing the benefits of instruction for the acquisition of the L2 pragmatics in the classroom (House & Kasper, 1981) focused on the acquisition of a variety of discourse markers and gambits by German EFL learners. The authors used two versions of the same communicative course addressed to two groups of learners: either *explicit* or *implicit* metapragmatic information. Results of the study showed that both groups improved in their acquisition of the target forms, but also that the explicit group had an advantage over the latter. Félix-Brasdefer (2008) investigated the development of refusal strategies in Spanish as a FL with two groups of students. Findings showed that without instruction some parts of pragmatic competence did not develop at all. Takahashi (2001) studied the effect of explicit teaching and other enhancement conditions on Japanese EFL learners' acquisition of request strategies and also reported explicit instruction as being more effective. Dastjerdi and Rezvani (2010) and Rezvani, Eslami-Rasekh and Dastjerdi (2014) also found positive effects of explicit instruction in Iranian EFL students when compared to implicit instruction, although neither of the studies obtained statistically significant differences between the explicit and implicit treatments. Similar findings were also reported by Iraji, Enayat and Momeni (2018) when they explored forty Iranian EFL learners' apology and request production after eight sessions of explicit or implicit instruction. In a more recent study, Economidou-Kogetsidiss, Soteriadou and Taxitari (2018) measured the amount of instruction needed (a minimum of six hours) for their 20 Greek-Cypriot EFL learners to develop internal modification. Some other studies, on the contrary, have focused on the effects of the combination of both explicit and implicit instruction and have found that such an approach seems to be more effective than instruction through only one of the approaches. This is the case of Martínez-Flor (2004) and Chalak and Abbasi (2015) in a distance learning context, among others.

The importance of instruction is also evident in studies that have explored the acquisition of L2 requests and suggestions, the two speech acts analyzed in the present study, since higher levels of proficiency have usually been found to relate to a decrease in the use direct strategies such as imperatives (please see Section 2.5 below). This is so in studies with adult SL learners (Hassall, 2003), with child learners (Achiba, 2003) and with FL learners (Félix-Brasdefer, 2007; Jalilifar, 2009). Although fewer studies have been conducted on suggestions than on requests, the findings are in the same line, that is, the level of proficiency in the L2 has an effect on the acquisition of suggestions (see Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1993; Koike, 1996; Alcón, 2001), or, as in Liu and Wang (2012) proficiency results in an increase in sociopragmatic awareness.

The relationship between instruction and pragmatic awareness has also been a relevant focus of research; generally speaking, findings show the need for instruction to trigger pragmatic awareness. For instance, Alcón (2005) investigated the effect of implicit and explicit instruction on pragmatic awareness of 132 Spanish students of EFL and concluded that explicit instruction was more beneficial to learners' pragmatic awareness. In a very different context (Iran), both Rafieyan, Sharafi-Nejad and Eng (2014) and Abdollahizadeh, Arjmandi and Vahdany (2014) show the effects of instruction on pragmatic awareness whether explicit, as in the former study, or as a combination of implicit and explicit methods, as in the latter. Participants in both studies showed gains in pragmatic awareness in the post-tests, although Rafieyan et al. (2014) did not find any statistically significant change in the delayed post-test.

2.2 *Audiovisual input in the L2 classroom. Captions and subtitles*

Audiovisual materials have been used in classrooms with the belief that, by doing so, "slices of language" could be brought into the classroom (Allan, 1985: 48). In relation to the acquisition of the L2 pragmatics, researchers such as Abrams (2014), Qi and Lai (2017) and Derakhshan and Eslami-Rasekh (2020) have claimed that films, series and video clips contain "contextualized language input" (Qi & Lai, 2017: 29) and, consequently, pragmatic features. Therefore, according to Martínez-Flor and Fernández Guerra (2002), such material can be considered as positive input in the FL classroom because audiovisuals can increase awareness of other cultures by teaching appropriateness and suitability, and can also offer visual reinforcement of the target language. Despite these positive aspects, however, audiovisual excerpts have also been criticized for being strenuous for learners, as Alcón and Safont (2008) claim. Hence, some researchers have put forth that subtitles or captions (see below) can be used to overcome this problem (e.g. Talaván, 2007). It is believed that reading the dialogue in context while listening to the original language stimulates learners to consolidate what they are learning by enriching their vocabulary and making them become familiar with the culture of the FL in an authentic setting (Talaván, 2007; Vanderplank, 2010).

Among the multiple options for subtitling, two of them are of interest for the present study: 1) *intralingual*, when the subtitles are in the original language of the movie (initially used for the deaf community of the source language), also known as *captions* (in the learners' L2); and, 2) *interlingual*, when the subtitles are translated into other languages to fit the needs of "foreign" audiences, or *subtitles* (in the learner's first language, i.e., their L1) (see Muñoz, 2017). Research to analyze the benefits of intra/interlingual subtitling has recently been carried out with both SL and FL learners; however, findings are still contradictory in relation to levels of proficiency and to the language areas that are acquired. Danan's (2004: 72) overview of such studies states that in the case of interlingual subtitled visual input "three independent systems are interconnected through triple associations between image, sound in one language and text in another, which may lead to better processing and recall because of the additive effects of both image and translation". More specifically, Markham and Peter (2003) proposed that L1 subtitles may be more useful to low-level learners, which in turn supported Guillory's (1998) theory that if the material in the video is too advanced for the learner's proficiency level, L2 subtitles cannot sufficiently compensate for the fast rate of speech and the difficulty of the vocabulary. Similarly, based on the studies carried out by Bairstow and Lavaur (2012), the interlingual condition appeared to lead to better comprehension across different proficiency levels, whereas the intralingual condition seemed to promote lexical learning.

In contrast, Montero Pérez, Van Den Noortgate and Desmet (2013) concluded that L2 subtitling may be equally effective for all proficiency levels as long as the video materials match the learners' actual level. In Frumuselu, De Maeyer, Donche and Gutiérrez's (2015) study on vocabulary, the researchers analyzed participants who were exposed to a TV series with English captions but with no instruction and found out that intralingual subtitles were more beneficial in the field of vocabulary. Muñoz (2017) carried out research using eye-tracking on three different age groups while watching two episodes of *The Simpsons* with subtitles. She discovered that children or beginner ESL learners fixated more on words than adults, adolescents or more proficient learners who skipped words in the subtitles more in their L1 than in the L2. She concluded that L1 subtitles may be more appropriate for learners whose vocabulary size is small and that higher proficiency levels can use L2 subtitles to aid L2 learning. Similar findings appear in Pujadas and Muñoz (2020) with secondary school EFL learners with a low level of proficiency, where the results on content comprehension of the groups that had followed the intervention with subtitles surpassed those of the groups in the captioned condition.

Taking the above-mentioned findings into consideration, and because of the lack of studies on the acquisition of pragmatics and pragmatic awareness through audiovisual input without any type of instruction and taking place out of the classroom, the following research question is posed:

1) Is there an effect of the use of captions on L2 pragmatic acquisition and awareness of requests and suggestions in EFL in an out-of-the-classroom activity?

3. THE STUDY

3.1 *Participants*

The participants were 28 second and third-year undergraduate students of English Studies at a Catalan university who volunteered for the study after being told that their answers to the tests would have no implications for class grades and that they would be able to benefit from a new experience in their EFL learning process. Students in our degree are used to taking part in the studies carried out by our research group, so we trusted the volunteers to follow the instructions we provided. Six of these participants were randomly chosen as focal learners to further explore the issue of pragmatic awareness. Their ages ranged between 19-24 (mean 19.96). Most of them (n=20) were bilingual in Spanish and Catalan and eight of them considered themselves as either Catalan or Spanish-dominant Their levels of proficiency in English ranged from B2 to C1 as described in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). However, in spite of the importance of pragmatic competence in FL learning, our participants, similarly to most students in the degree, are not specifically instructed on English pragmatics in the classroom but are unconsciously exposed to pragmatic issues when doing leisure activities in English.

3.2 *Research design*

The study followed a pre/post-test design. Between the pre-test and the post-test, the participants were asked to watch one season from a TV show. They were randomly divided into two groups: Group A watched the series with captions while Group B watched it without captions. The show, the hit sitcom *Modern Family* (Season 6, 24 episodes), was chosen for three main reasons. First, this sitcom presents a high number of interactional exchanges between different characters which provide an excellent resource of familiar interaction for the learners. Second, it is a well-known popular American sitcom that people from around the world have access to. Finally, each episode of the show is approximately 21.5 minutes, which implies a relatively short and not arduous task for the students' schedules. Season 6 was chosen because of the high numbers of requests and suggestions that learners would encounter (see results for the number and types below) and because, due to availability at the moment of the experiment, none of the participants had watched this specific season before.

3.3 *Instruments*

3.3.1 *Background questionnaire and Oxford Placement Test*
The background questionnaire used in this study was designed by the GRAL Research Group (www.ubgral.com). It inquired into general and detailed language exposure, namely, how frequently the participants watched movies and TV shows with subtitles, without subtitles, in their original language or dubbed, it also asked about reading books, listening to music, going

abroad, taking English classes and even attending language camps. Furthermore, both the grammar and the listening parts of the Oxford Placement Test (OPT) (Allan, 1992) were used to evaluate the participants' level of English.

3.3.2 *Written Discourse Completion Task*
A Written Discourse Completion Task (WDCT) was devised to assess and measure the participants' pragmatic performance. WDCTs have been widely used as an elicitation instrument in studies of pragmatics, since, although also criticized (Bardovi-Harlig, 2015), they are believed to be appropriate means to measure spoken language in written form (Cohen & Shively, 2007). Bardovi-Harlig (2013) confirmed that WDCTs provide opportunities to draw on explicit pragmatic knowledge. In addition, WDCTs allow researchers to control for different variables so as to get comparable results from the participants' responses.

The situations in the WDCT were created on the basis of those appearing in the series. After analyzing the sixth season of the series, 20 situations were designed for the WDCT. The WDCT included ten suggestions (henceforth, SS1-10) and ten requests (henceforth, RS1-10), with low social distance, i.e. between parents and children, siblings and partners. For instance:

RS1. You want water and you want to ask your son or daughter to bring it for you. You say:

SS6. Your friend is looking for a nice dress for Christmas. You know a good place she could go to that is having a sale. You say:

3.3.3 *Oral recall interview*
To provide further support to the WDCT and to analyze learners' pragmatic awareness (as stated in the research question), ten questions were created for six of the participants. The six focal learners were selected randomly, two per each proficiency level and group (A and B; see procedure below). The questions asked the participants about three main issues, namely, if they had paid attention to request and suggestion strategies in the show, if they believed they had learned anything and, finally, if and why they had changed their answers in the post-test. The recall interview was conducted a month after the post-test and lasted for around 15 minutes.

3.4 *Procedure*

First, the WDCT was piloted with 17 students in the same degree as the participants and, after receiving their feedback, it was modified accordingly. Then, once final participants had completed the OPT and the background questionnaire, they were divided into two random groups: Group A with 14 participants who watched the series with captions and Group B with 14 participants who watched the series without captions.

The participants were then asked to complete the situations provided in the WDCT at home through a link provided online via Google Form. A consent form was placed in the first part of the Google Form that prevented the participants from going forward with the task if they did not agree with the terms and where they were also asked whether they had already watched *Modern Family* to control for any effects it might cause in the results. Subsequently, the data from the WDCT were gathered and coded. The participants were then given a deadline to watch all 24 episodes of *Modern Family* and after 45 days, the participants were asked to take the same WDCT again. There was no specific control on individual conditions when watching the episodes to make the task as similar as possible to a real-life activity, although such absence of control might also entail the possibility of the non-captioned participants having resorted to captions at certain times. This possibility, however, was very low bearing in

mind the type of participants and the null implications of the experiment for their class grades, as explained above.

The data were collected and categorized. Two English native speakers raters with previous experience in assessing pragmatics analyzed the data and the agreement reached was 90%; the disagreements were later discussed by the three authors of this paper.

3.5 *Measures*

Achiba's (2003) taxonomy of requests and the taxonomy of suggestions by Martínez-Flor (2004) were chosen to code the data because they have been widely used in other studies, which might allow for future comparisons of the findings in the present study with other studies. Achiba's taxonomy classifies requests into:

1)   *Direct*: the most explicit strategy in which the speaker expresses a request to the hearer.
  a. Mood Derivable (e.g. Give me a hand, come on!)
  b. Obligation Statements (e.g. You can't tell mom!)
  c. Want Statements (e.g. I want you to think about it tomorrow)

2)   *Conventionally indirect* (hearer-based): strategies conventionalized by the language which take reference to contextual preconditions necessary for its performance.
  a. Suggestory Formulae (e.g. You should help me do it)
  b. Stating Preparatory (e.g., I would appreciate it if you would not tell mom)
  c. Query Preparatory (e.g. Could you help me please?)

3)   *Non-conventionally indirect strategies*: when a speaker uses a hint to imply a request, the hearer must infer from that expression what the speaker means.
  a. Hints (Is it necessary to bring him?)

Martínez-Flor's (2004) suggestion taxonomy is divided into four main categories:

1) *Direct strategies* show directly what the speaker means.
  a. Performative verb (e.g. I would suggest you to get that tattoo)
  b. A noun of suggestion (e.g. My suggestion/recommendation/advice would be to take it slow)
  c. Imperative (e.g. Try to talk to her)
  d. Negative imperative (e.g. Don't be sad!)

2) *Conventionalized forms* are specific linguistic formulae that prevent the hearer from misinterpreting the intention of the suggestion directly uttered while being on some level, indirect. In this section there are five subcategories:
  a. Specific formulae (e.g., Why don't you call a friend?)
  b. Possibility or probability (e.g. You could try to listen to them)
  c. Should (e.g. You should think this through)
  d. Need (e.g. You need to make sure you want to break up with her)
  e. Conditional (e.g. If I were you, I would tell her in the best way possible)

3) *Indirect forms* are classified into:
  a. Impersonal (e.g. It could be the best option for us)
  b. Hints (e.g. There's a shop I know where they are on sale)

4) *Other forms* were placed into a new section when the examples did not fit into prior categories
   a. Inclusive We (e.g. Let's take a picture!)
   b. Obligation (e.g. You must choose something you like)

Another suggestion strategy was added to this list after following Pattemore (2017), who found that the boundary between a request and a suggestion was not always clear. In other words, the theoretical distinction of request being speaker-oriented and suggestion being hearer-oriented may sometimes intersect, as in example (1) below:

(1)   *Request-Suggestion* (e.g. Could you take a picture of us, please?)

It is relevant to point out that these taxonomies were used for the classification of both the requests and suggestions in the 24 episodes that the participants watched and the WDCTs that they completed before and after watching the season in order to compare the participants' production to the input they had received either with or without captions.

4. RESULTS

The results presented in this section have been divided into two parts. First, the statistical results for both requests and suggestions together from the pre- and the post-watching WDCTs are presented separately for each of the two groups (captioned and non-captioned). Then the results for each of the speech acts are analyzed in relation to the number and type of requests and suggestions appearing in the input (Season 6 of *Modern Family*). In the second part, the results from the oral recall interviews to the six focal participants on the issue of pragmatic awareness are presented.

4.1 *WDCT*

The data was submitted to statistical analysis (SPSS V.21 for Mac) and after this, results were examined in a more qualitative way by means of frequencies. To analyze the changes in the strategies used between the pre- and the post-tests in each situation, a Marginal Homogeneity test was applied, since the data were not normally distributed, and the strategies were coded nominally. Marginal Homogeneity explored if there was a significant difference between the pre-test and the post-test answers in the WDCT.

In order to analyze if captions play a role in the acquisition of the L2 pragmatics when watching TV shows at home, the differences between time 1 and time 2 while accounting for the influence of captions was analyzed. Results from the participants who watched the series with captions (Group A) showed that there were statistically significant differences in SS1 ($p < .050$). In the case of participants who had no captions when watching the series (Group B), RS1 ($p < .050$), SS1 ($p = .051$), SS2 ($p = .063$) and SS3 ($p = .058$) were marginally significantly different.

The Wilcoxon signed rank test was run to analyze the potential differences in every request and suggestion strategy for each participant under captioned and non-captioned conditions. Participants in Group A, who watched the series with captions, showed significant changes in request strategy, *Mood Derivable* (Pre M = .64, SD = .842 vs. Post M = 1.29, SD = 1.204; z = 2.124, $p = .034$); in Group B, non-captioned condition, *Imperatives suggestions* (Pre M = .62, SD = .266 vs. Post M = 1.38, SD = .290; z = 1.897, $p = .058$) approached significance.

The results indicate that, when captions were screened, most of the strategies failed to show any statistically significant change.

In order to compare the participants' answers with the input, the *Modern Family* Season 6 script was analyzed and all the request and suggestion strategies were counted (Figure 1 and Figure 2, respectively). As shown in Figure 1, regarding request strategies, *Mood Derivable* (72%) is the most recurring type followed by *Query Preparatory* (15%); *Inclusive We* (56%) and *Should* (13%) are the most used suggestion strategies (see Figure 2).
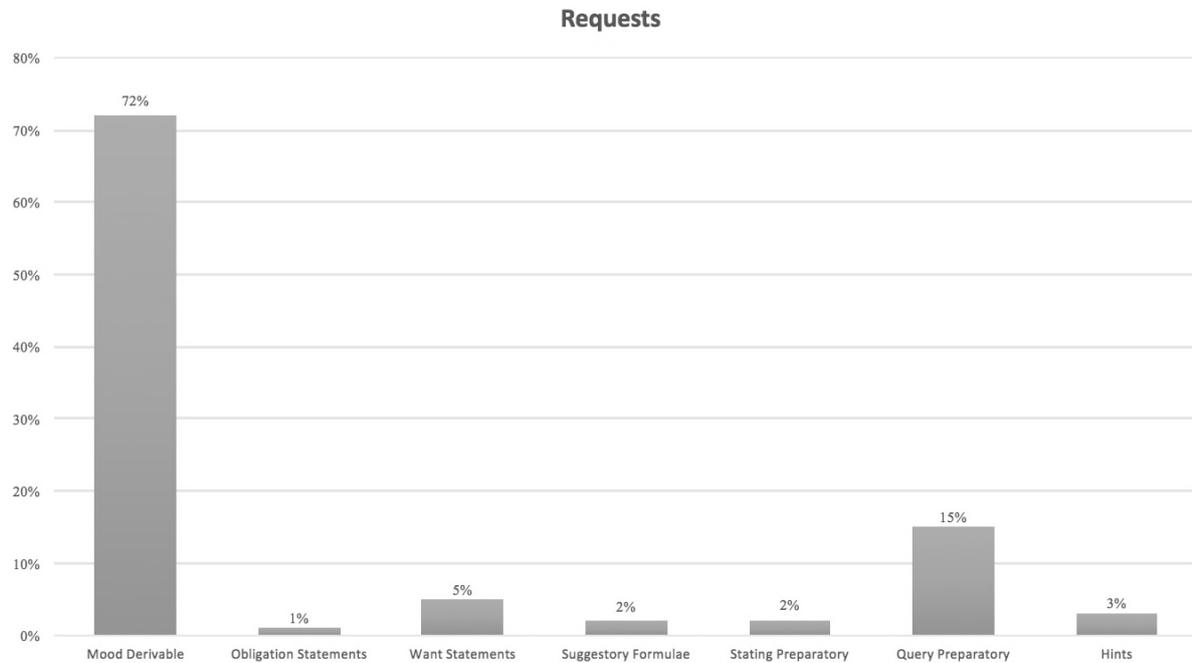
Requests

Figure 1: **Requests in season 6**
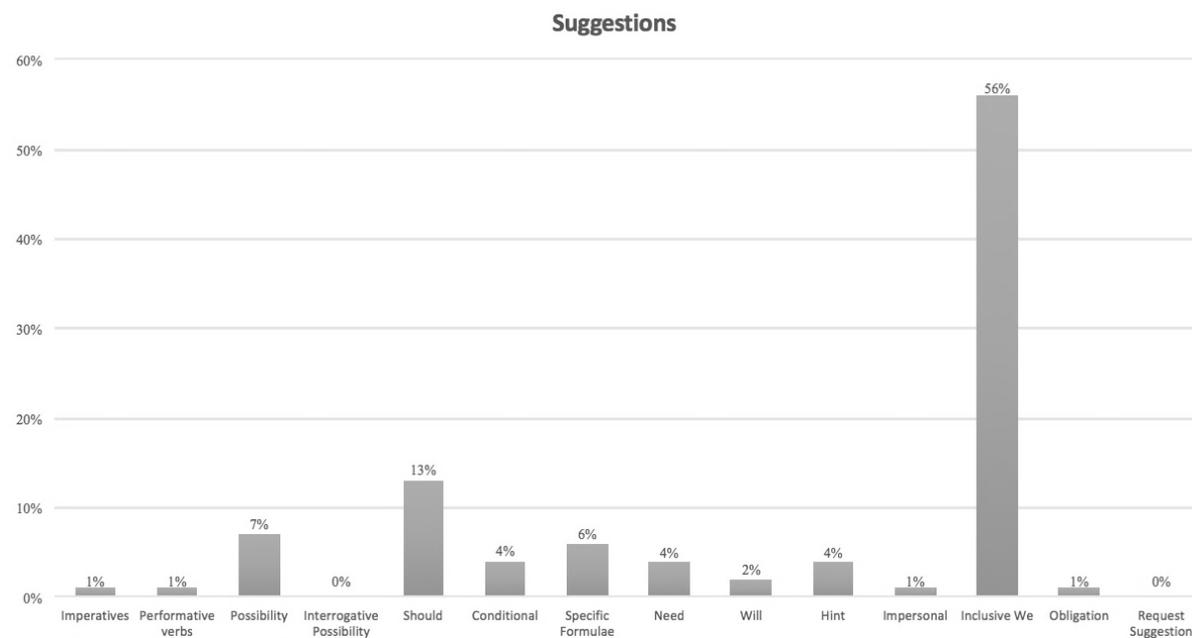
Suggestions

Figure 2: **Suggestions in season 6**

98

All the request and suggestion strategies in the pre and post-test were also counted. Figure 3 shows which request strategies were used in the pre-test and post-test. *Mood Derivable*, which rose from 8% to 14%, and *Stating Preparatory* which gained 4% from 0% in the pre-test, are the most obvious changes. *Obligation Statement* was not used anymore in the post-test, *Want Statement* dropped from 4% to 2%, *Suggestory Formulae* was used unlike in the pre-test, the use of *Query Preparatory* decreased by 4% to 63%, *Hints* by 3% to 14% and the percentage of participants who failed to use any request strategies dropped by 1%.
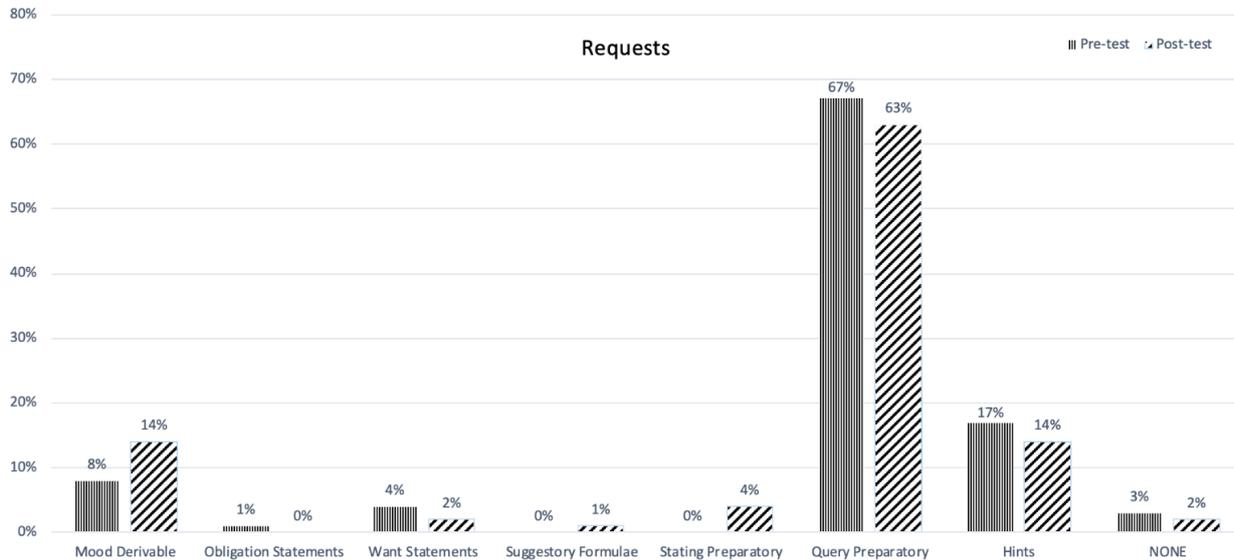
*Figure 3: **Request strategies pre and post-test***

The suggestion strategies that were more popular among the participants in the pre-test and the post-test appear in Figure 4 below. The most apparent changes were I*mperatives* and *No Suggestions*. *Imperatives* rose from 9% to 16%. Additionally, *Possibility* rose from 3% to 7% and *Should* dropped by 2% to 15%. The use of *Conditional* decreased by 1% to 7%, while *Specific Formulae* increased by 1% to 8%. *Need* was no longer used, but *Will* increased to 1%. *Hint* rose by 1% to 6%, *Inclusive We* rose by 2% to 24%, *Obligation* dropped to 2%, *Request Suggestion* was used unlike in the pre-test and participants who failed to use any sort of suggestion strategies dropped from 20% to 12%.
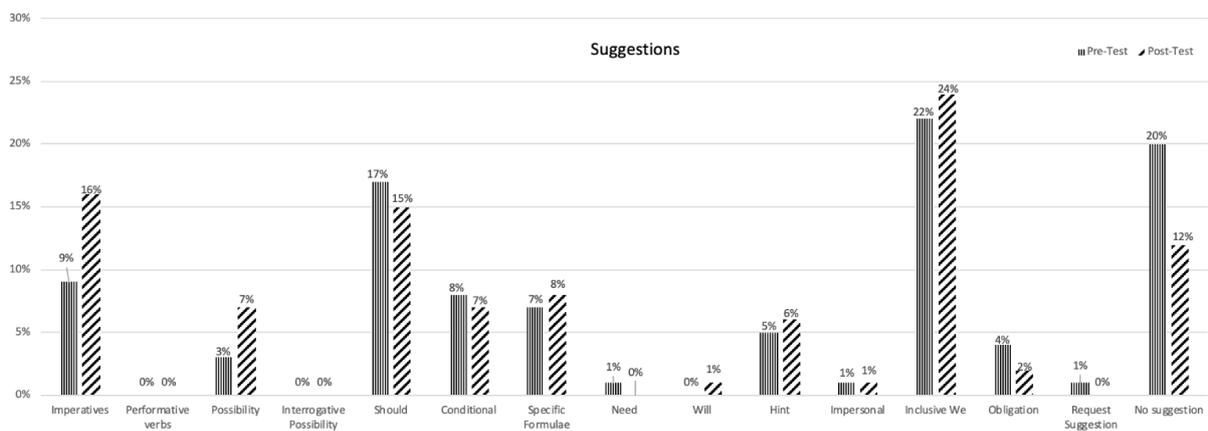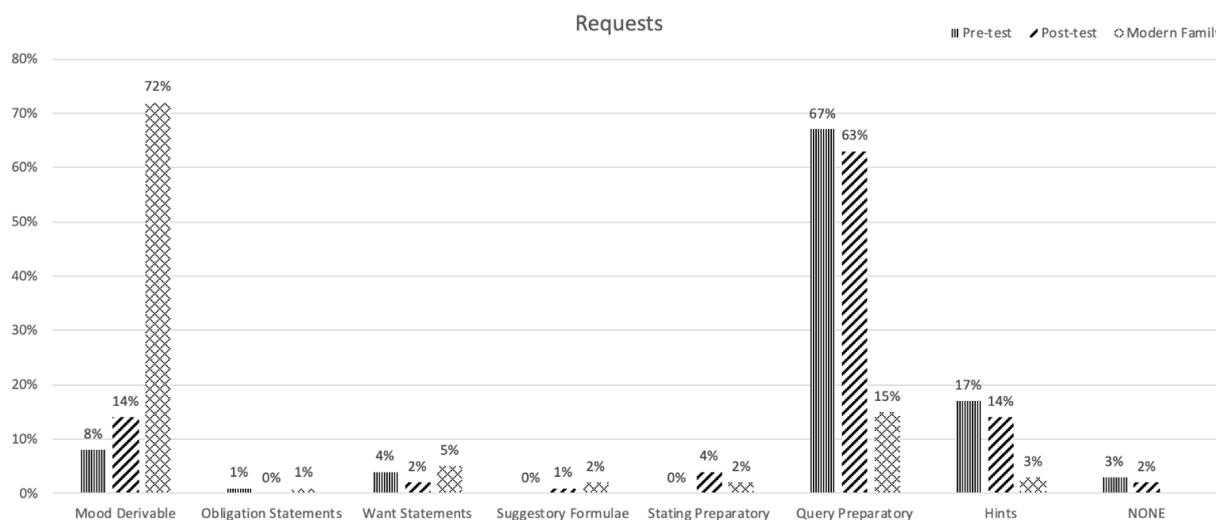
However, *Performative verbs* (0%), *Interrogative Possibilities* (0%) and *Impersonal* (1%) did not show any change. These results confirmed the statistical analysis. Furthermore,

as the strategies appearing on the show and the strategies used in the WDCT were compared, the slight alteration in the post-test percentages illustrated how the strategies were similar to those used in *Modern Family* (see Figures 5 and 6).
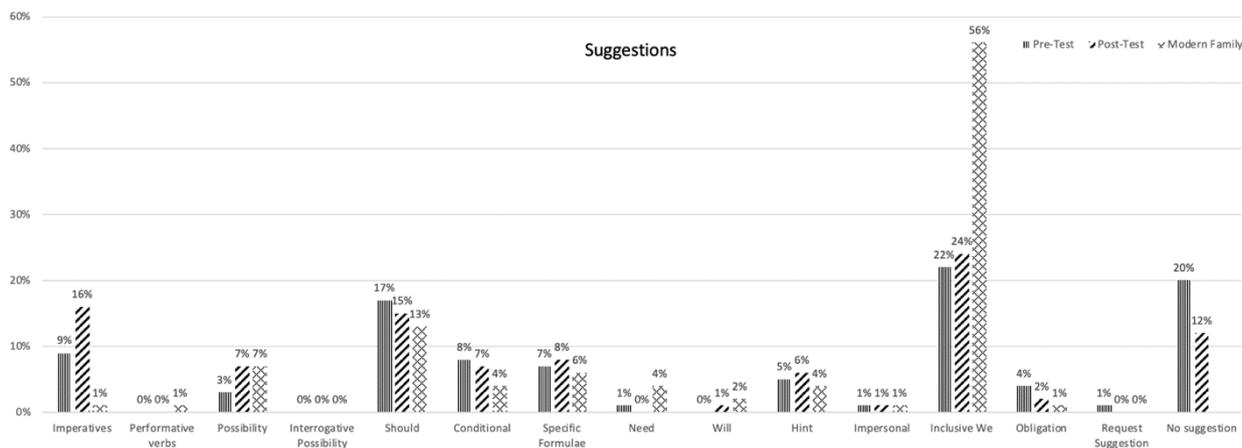
*Figure 5: **Request strategies compared***

*Figure 6: **Suggestion strategies compared***

4.2 *Oral Recall Interview*

The six focal participants who took part in the oral recall interviews were asked about the pragmatic choices they made while writing their answers in the WDCTs. Even if the interview was carried out with only six participants, it provided valuable information about what the

participants might have been thinking while doing the task, so as to know whether they were pragmatically aware of their choices.

When asked if they paid attention to the suggestions and requests while watching the show, all six participants unanimously reported they did not think they had done so. In this sense, four of the learners stated that they might have learned some strategies in class or through other TV shows as the reason for having changed their answers in the post-test; the other two focal participants did not recall the process. When the learners were asked if they had learned anything from the show, two of them said that they believed they had learned vocabulary by watching *Modern Family*. One participant recalled learning pronunciation and the other two participants answered that they were probably unaware of any acquisition; only one of the participants expressed uncertainty.

All the participants were convinced they would have learned more if they had continued watching the series. When the participants who watched the show with captions were asked if they had paid attention to the captions, they stated to have focused on the written form and on some expressions; furthermore, they claimed that the captions provided help to understand the accent. When the other participants, who watched the show without captions, were asked if they felt the need to have captions, two of them reported they would have learned more with captions because they had struggled with the accents.

The learners were also asked why they had changed their answers to some of the situations. One of the participants said: "Through the exposure while watching. You see how they speak". One participant also reported not noticing any difference in her two suggestions, one using *could* and the other *should*. Furthermore, she emphasized that she liked changing her strategies even in the same situations so as not to repeat herself. Finally, where learners had to ask their friend not to bring his/her annoying friend, one of the participants stated that she thought some situations made her be more polite than others.

5. DISCUSSION

The research question in the present study inquired into the possible differences in L2 pragmatic acquisition and awareness between two groups that watched videos with and without captions, respectively, in an out-of-the-classroom context. Such context has been scarcely analyzed in previous studies in relation to the benefits of audiovisual material and, more specifically, on the benefits of captions. The results presented above showed that in the captioned condition, only three suggestion situations (SS1, SS3 and SS5) resulted in a statistically significant change in the participants' responses in the post-watching WDCT. This may show that these specific situations might have been more tangible than others. However, after examining the answers to these situations in detail, it was found that none of the answers matched the script used in the show. Hence, in these situations, the participants did not seem to use the strategies for suggesting that appeared in the episodes. This could be due to the fact that captions tend to promote lexical learning (Bairstow & Lavaur, 2012; Frumuselu et al., 2015) and, therefore, the intralingual subtitles might not have helped the learners to focus on pragmatic forms. Likewise, when the non-captioned condition was analyzed for requests, although RS1, SS1 and SS9 showed a statistically significant difference between the pre and the post WDCT, there was no similarity between the participants' answers and the strategies used in the series. Despite these outcomes, learners did change their responses in the post-test, even though they were not the same as what the characters used on the show in the specific situations.

When strategies were analyzed for each participant in the two conditions, under the captioned condition, only request strategy *Mood Derivable* showed a marginally significant

difference in the post-test. Moreover, in the group without captions, *Mood Derivable* (request) and *Imperatives* (suggestion) exhibited marginally significant changes in the post-test. This shows that the mentioned strategies were used only slightly more after the treatment. Consequently, in this study, the changes in Group A participants' responses could not be traced to captions. This could be due to the lack of instruction or the lack of attention on pragmatics, in line with Schmidt's Noticing Hypothesis (1993), which states that little or no intake can take place without the learners noticing the L2 features. Alternatively, as suggested above, some of the participants assigned to the non-captioned group might have used captions from time to time to make the task easier, a fact which might be responsible for this lack of differences, but which could not be controlled for due to the need to make the task as similar as possible to watching videos in real life.

After counting the strategies used in *Modern Family* and the request and suggestion strategies in the pre-test and the post-test, the percentages show that, since the situations and interactions in *Modern Family* were completely familiar, the characters in the show tended to produce too many instances of request *Direct Strategies* (*Mood Derivable*, in particular, as shown in Figure 2). Furthermore, a mild tendency towards the strategies used in *Modern Family* could be identified. This could be caused by the repetition of the strategies and the tangibility of the contexts in question. Hence, as in Rose (1997, 2001) and Arthur (1999), the situations might have triggered an awareness of how the characters used different request and suggestion strategies in various situations which led to a slight alteration of their answers in the post-test towards the strategies more implemented on the show.

In line with Liu and Wang (2012), even if learners showed some type of sociopragmatic acquisition, they were more inclined to use similar strategies in the pre-test and the post-test. However, as opposed to Scarcella (1979), Trosborg (1995), Félix-Brasdefer (2007) and Jalilifar (2009), the participants of this study seemed to have failed to follow the pattern from *Direct* to *Conventionally Indirect strategies*. Such finding might be due to the familiar situations among family members they were exposed to in the TV series. It could be concluded that 552 minutes of one season of *Modern Family* in one month may not have been sufficient for acquisition to take place without instruction. Conversely, the lack of variety in the post-test responses can also be explained through the familiar situations observed in the series and in the WDCT. Hence, the participants failed to see a purpose in changing their answers.

The oral recall interviews seemed to show that the six focal participants did not notice or pay attention to the appointed strategies. The marginal statistically significant difference observed in the post-test could be the result of the appearance of the request and suggestion strategies in their university classes, books, songs or other TV shows they are surrounded by in their everyday lives. Most participants believed they had consciously or unconsciously learned pronunciation and vocabulary while watching the series. However, they also believed they would have learned more if they had continued the treatment. The captions seemed to have been a need for some of the participants because they had problems with the characters' accents. In fact, the learners who watched *Modern Family* with the aid of captions reported understanding the series better. This seems to go in line with Mayer (2009), who claimed that learners may learn better from words and pictures appearing together and with Pujadas and Muñoz (2020), whose participants with a low level of proficiency in EFL obtained better results when being exposed to subtitles (in their L1) than those who watched the series with captions.

6. CONCLUSION

This study focused on L2 pragmatic acquisition through watching one season of a TV show without instruction with captioned/non-captioned conditions as an out-of-the-class activity.

The results indicated a certain change in the learners' post-test, which could have been due to some strategies appearing more frequently in *Modern Family*. Nevertheless, only a small number of suggestion and request strategies yielded statistically significant differences between the groups. The participants were also using more suggestion strategies in the post-test than in the pre-test. As a result, it is claimed here that an effect of audiovisual support on suggestion and request strategies could be observed. However, there seems to be no evident advantage in L2 pragmatic acquisition and awareness in favour of the participants who watched the show with captions.

It should be mentioned, though, that the study has several limitations. First, the low number of participants might have influenced the results. Second, a longer treatment period might have led to more pragmatic acquisition and awareness, as the participants themselves claimed. Third, the low social distance the learners were exposed to might have also had an effect; future studies, then, should include a wider variety of situations in terms of social distance.

In conclusion, this study has shown that audiovisual support without any instruction and as part of out-of-class activities may lead to changes in students' pragmatic knowledge regardless of captions. These findings have some pedagogical implications. If audiovisual support influences pragmatic learning, teachers should incorporate it more frequently in the FL class with the explicit aim of raising students' pragmatic awareness, so learners can later use such awareness when watching series at home. And this is so even at relatively high levels of proficiency in EFL, as is the case of our participants in the degree of English Studies. Furthermore, although outside the scope of this paper, there seem to be clear implications in relation to autonomous learning when carrying out activities that focus on pragmatics out of the classroom context.

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