



Book review

Investigating Pragmatics in Foreign Language Learning, Teaching, and Testing

Eva Alcón Soler and Alicia Martínez-Flor (Eds.), Multilingual Matters, Bristol, 2008, xi+266 pp., £27.95 (pbk)

Part of the Second Language Acquisition (SLA) series, *Investigating Pragmatics in Foreign Language Learning, Teaching and Testing* contributes to the area of interlanguage pragmatics through its connection to cognitive, internationalist and sociocultural approaches. The book covers three areas of foreign language pragmatics—learning, teaching, and testing. These three areas are explored in pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic perspectives (see the distinction between these two areas in Thomas, 1983). Various instrument types and research conventions are discussed. Concrete suggestions are made regarding foreign language learner characteristics, pedagogical implications and research design improvement.

The editors, Soler and Martínez-Flor, provide an introduction of the book in Chapter 1 (pp. 3–21). Pragmatic competence is viewed as a construct of communicative competence, drawing from Bachman's (1990) model. Sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic competence are equally important and the interdependence between the two is emphasized. Also in the centre of this overview is the relationship between interlanguage pragmatics and second language acquisition theories. Theoretical approaches, such as Schmidt's (1993, 1995, 2001) noticing hypothesis and Long's (1996) interactive approach are reviewed in terms of their relevance to the effectiveness of pragmatic instruction. A review of the conversational analysis (CA) approach establishes the relationship between pragmatic and cultural learning. Difficulties of learning pragmatics in foreign contexts, according to the editors, are often caused by a poverty of input, from gaps in the instructional materials, the instructor's background, and general learning environment. Thus, pragmatic instruction, preferably with provision of explicit metalinguistic information, is highly recommended in the foreign language learning contexts. Several methodological issues are highlighted in this chapter as well. The question on how to clearly operationalize the so-called "implicit conditions" (in contrast to "explicit conditions") is raised for considerations in future experimental designs. Qualitative methods, represented by the CA approach, are recommended as appropriate ways to examine sociocultural perspectives in pragmatic learning.

Part One targets the developmental issues of learning pragmatics in foreign contexts. Pragmatic learning is depicted differently based on the contexts, including language classrooms, content-based classrooms and online communities. Different interlocutors, such as classroom instructors, guest speakers and peers, come into play during the learners' pragmatic learning process.

For example, in Chapter 2 (pp. 25–44), DuFon illustrates how Language Socialization (LS) Theory can be used in examining pragmatic learning in foreign classroom contexts. LS theory distinguishes two types of social interaction: "socialization to use language" refers to the traditional pragmatic teaching in formal classroom settings, where learners are taught how to express pragmatic forms in certain contexts appropriately. "Socialization through the use of language", on the other hand, is more inductive in nature and assumes that learners acquire the pragmatic knowledge through using the target language in interactive settings. The latter is also described as a self-realization process, in which the teacher's role is to orientate the learners into the target cultural community. An interesting factor is the "two-way process" (p. 28) of socialization. In foreign language contexts, learners are not only being socialized into the target culture but also perform a role of socializing their interlocutors into their culture. It is this "two-way process" that not only facilitates learners' pragmatic competence development but also influences the interlocutors' interactional patterns.

One way to address the poverty of input in foreign language pragmatic instruction is by inviting a speaker who is a native speaker of the target language into the language classroom. In Chapter 3 (pp. 45–71), Tateyama and Kasper examine the learning of requests in a Japanese as a foreign language classroom. The interaction among the instructor, invited speaker, and learners is studied from a CA perspective. The authors demonstrate the benefits of the presence of an invited speaker, who provides another angle on pragmatic learning through exhibiting a different social role and adopting different pragmalinguistic choices from the classroom instructor.

In Chapter 4 (pp. 72–93), Hassall adopted the immediate retrospective reports to examine learners' pragmatic production in roleplay situations. He argues that the retrospective report is one of the most effective ways to reveal the interaction between the learners' use of pragmatic forms and their intentions in specific sociocultural contexts. However, the retrospective report, to achieve its ultimate advantage, should be conducted after the entire roleplay, rather than

immediately after learners' utterance of each targeted pragmatic form. This is to ensure that learners' thinking process is not interrupted during pragmatic production.

In Chapter 5 (pp. 94–113), Nikula explores whether content classrooms, where no pragmatic instruction is included, could serve as good platforms for implicit learning of target pragmatic features. The author points out that the learners, with their interlanguage pragmatic forms, succeeded in realizing their communicative goals among peers, despite the fact that their pragmatic production did not exactly match with that produced by native speakers. This finding might suggest the limited use of following a native speaker standard in the contexts of English as a lingua franca.

An online communicative context, realized through the synchronous computer-mediated communication (SCMC), is discussed in Chapter 6 (pp. 114–134). González-Lloret examines learners' online interaction with native speakers from a CA perspective. SCMC is advocated as a useful tool to promote pragmatic learning in foreign language contexts, where face-to-face encounters with expert speakers of the target language might not often be practical.

Part Two focuses on pragmatics teaching in foreign language contexts. Although the three studies in this part do not cover all instructional types, they raise good examples of pragmatic instruction that works well for EFL learners.

House's paper, Chapter 7 (pp. 135–152), brings up the innovative idea that translation should not only be utilized merely in linguistic demonstrations but should also be used as a way to enhance pragmatic learning. Due to its high demand on the match between linguistic forms and cultural implications, translation helps to draw learners' attention to both the pragmatic forms and sociocultural contexts. This instructional practice, however, might only be suitable for advanced learners, who already possess sufficient metalinguistic knowledge of both their L1 and the target language.

Should native-speaking norms be the standard for all pragmatic learning? Kondo's study, Chapter 8 (pp. 153–177), seems to suggest again that the answer to this reoccurring question is *no*. Explicit instruction did help learners produce more target-like requests, yet a majority of the learners maintained their own identity in selecting certain pragmatic choices purposefully, such as the statement of regrets (e.g. *I'm sorry*). This deliberate choice of L1-like expressions revealed learners' protection of their own cultural identity. Such protection does not mean that the learners are not pragmatically competent; instead, as the author suggests, learners should be allowed to choose the pragmatic forms that they see fit in given contexts.

In Chapter 9 (pp. 178–200), Eslami and Eslami-Rasekh examine the effectiveness of input-enhancement instruction on pragmatic awareness and production for a group of advanced EFL learners being trained to become English instructors in a TESOL master's program. Significant treatment effects were shown for the experimental group in the two pragmatic measurements. The authors' description of the treatment could benefit pedagogical practices. Their introduced classroom activities are recommended for pragmatic instruction for advanced language learners.

Finding the most suitable measurements has been a long-term concern of pragmatic researchers, who always have to juggle among the issues of practicality, validity and reliability of the currently available measurements. The three papers in Part Three, targeting the issue of interlanguage pragmatic assessment introduce hands-on techniques in validating instrument design.

In Chapter 10 (pp. 201–223), Yamashita stresses the importance of including both comprehension and production in pragmatic assessment. Because existing pragmatic tests overwhelmingly focus on speech acts, yet speech acts alone do not represent the overall pragmatic competence, the author calls for more future interlanguage pragmatic research on currently less represented pragmatic features, such as “[p]hatic expressions, prosodics, turn-taking, [and] backchannels” (p. 217). An essential part of this paper compares the advantages and shortcomings of five pragmatic assessment tools: While discourse completion tasks (DCTs) are most widely used and are convenient to administer to large participant groups, they cannot convey the same results as naturally occurring data, nor can they reveal learners' comprehension of the prompts. Similar problems exist for the use of multiple-choice tests as well. Roleplays, on the other hand, could potentially resemble natural data, but they require sufficient training of the interlocutor as well as a solid design of the grading rubric. Picture prompts were suggested as a useful tool in assessing younger learners' pragmatic competence (e.g. Rose, 2000), and such visual representations, along with video prompts, are predicted to be effective and strong tools to use for future research.

Adopting both classical Spearman-Brown (S-B) prophecy formula and generalizability theory (G-theory) approaches, Brown, in Chapter 11 (pp. 224–248), compares the dependability of four types of pragmatic assessments, namely written DCT, oral DCT, discourse roleplay task and roleplay self-assessment. Raters and item types stood out as two of the most important predictors of errors in the analysis. Therefore, the author suggests that sufficient sizes of these two variables should be included in future instrument design.

In Chapter 12 (pp. 249–260), Roever considers three facets, test-taker ability, rater judgements and item difficulty, as interdependent from each other in a written DCT test. While the results showed little disagreement among the three raters, the author accounts this fact for the simplicity of the rating task and the use of rejoinders, which limit the raters to assess “a much narrower range of response options” (p. 263). These results, taking both the practicality and reliability into consideration, could potentially enlighten test design for future interlanguage pragmatic studies.

Investigating Pragmatics in Foreign Language Learning, Teaching, and Testing offers thorough analyses on the three dimensions of interlanguage pragmatics. The selections of articles, rooted in SLA theories, provide a variety of perspectives on interlanguage pragmatic development, instruction, and assessment. This book would make a suitable reference for any researcher or instructor interested in exploring L2 pragmatics in foreign language contexts.

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