



Using film to provide a context for teaching L2 pragmatics



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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examines the pragmatic tools that first-year learners of German from two intact classes have at their disposal at the beginning and at the end of an eight-week period. The control ($n = 15$) and treatment groups ($n = 22$) watched a feature film, *The Edukators*, as part of the study. The control group answered comprehension questions based on the film, while the treatment group completed tasks focused on pragmatics, using the film as context-rich scaffolding for analyzing authentic, discourse-length language. The pre- and post-tests were administered eight weeks apart and elicited dialogs based on interactions in the film. Learners' metapragmatic reflections were also analyzed. The data suggests that participants in the treatment group were better able to vary their responses to reflect relationships between interactants or the purpose of the exchange, utilizing the social context portrayed in the film and explicit pragmatic instruction. Their ability to express pragmatic variability, albeit with limited linguistic tools, has implications for understanding beginning language learners' pragmatic abilities and for the possibilities of using films for teaching pragmatics in foreign language contexts, where other types of authentic input may be scarce.

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1. Introduction

Communicative competence has been the foundational goal for second language (L2) instruction since Hymes (1972) framed language as a socially grounded and contextualized activity. Nonetheless, beginning textbooks in the U.S. still often present language at the sentence level, introducing themes and vocabulary primarily to support a grammar sequence that has changed little over the last few decades. In this context, pragmatic competence plays a minor role (Eisenchlas, 2011), and the limited pragmatic information that is provided is presented as a direct match between a linguistic form and individual speech acts (e.g., the imperative in German is used to make requests), with little attention paid to appropriate uses of these forms and no explicit pragmatic information provided (Eisenchlas, 2011; de Pablos-Ortega, 2011). How and when information presented in textbooks can best be supplemented to ensure adequate modeling of the social context and build pragmatic skills remain unanswered questions, especially at beginning stages of language learning (Jeon & Kaya, 2006). The present study seeks answers to these questions by examining the pragmatic tools available to first-year learners of German, who learned pragmatics with the support of the feature film *The Edukators*.¹ Grounding this study in a broader scholarly context, the paper first

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¹ *Die fetten Jahre sind vorbei* (*The Edukators*) Sic. (2004). Director: Hans Weingartner. Received the Outstanding Feature Film Award in 2005 in Germany. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0408777/>. Screenplay at <http://www.tes.co.uk>.

reviews the construct of pragmatic competence, approaches to teaching it, and the potential of filmic materials for providing useful pragmatic L2 scaffolding.

2. Review of the literature

2.1. Pragmatic competence

Most models of communicative competence recognize pragmatic competence – defined here as “the study of speaker and hearer meaning created in their joint actions that include both linguistic and nonlinguistic signals in the context of socio-culturally organized activities” (LoCastro, 2003: p. 15) – as an important aspect of successful L2 interactions (Bachman, 1990; Canale & Swain, 1980; Hymes, 1972; Savignon, 1997). Pragmatic competence is comprised of two types of knowledge: *pragmalinguistic* (how language form affects meaning) and *sociopragmatic* (how to adapt language according to situational or social factors) (Bella, 2012; Cenoz, 2007; Rose & Kasper, 2001). It is not certain which type of pragmatic knowledge is learned first (pragmalinguistic or sociopragmatic), or whether they develop in a more ecological fashion (Chang, 2010; Ellis, 2009; Rose, 2000), but research suggests that progress follows observable patterns, starting with simple, unanalyzed formulaic units (e.g., “thank you” or “can you, please...”), moving on to increasingly complex, nuanced and multifunctional language use (Bardovi-Harlig, 2009; Kasper & Rose, 2001).

Several factors contribute to pragmatic development, including the learners' overall language proficiency (Bardovi-Harlig, 2009; Takahashi, 2005) and the context of learning. For example, Bella (2012) and Schauer (2006) found that non-native speakers living in L2 contexts with access to authentic L2 materials recognize pragmatic mistakes more readily than foreign language learners. Others note, however, that even advanced learners living in an L2 environment continue to have pragmatic difficulties for a long time (Jeon & Kaya, 2006).

Just as important might be the speaker's general pragmatic awareness, i.e., the ability to interpret the dynamic demands of an interaction in any language (Bella, 2012; García, 2004; Kasper, 2004; Leech, 1983; Savignon, 1997; Young & Miller, 2004). This skill must be developed both in the L1 and the L2; they are not an innate part of native speakers' abilities either. They pose a particular challenge in the L2, however, as the speaker attends to linguistic and sociolinguistic rules simultaneously with the social needs of the interaction (Mills, 2009). This ability to interpret and meet the social needs of an interaction is crucial, because “[a] highly grammatically competent non-native speaker who violates sociopragmatic norms might easily be judged by a native speaker not as linguistically inadequate but as subservient, impolite, or unfriendly” (Bella, 2012: p. 20). Speech acts are an established approach to teaching pragmatic competence, including comparisons of realizations between L1 and L2 use (Cohen, 2008). However, increasing attention focuses on discursive approaches to pragmatics and politeness, suggesting that discourse-length, authentic models in language learning are essential in order to help learners explore notions of “appropriateness” and speaker/learner agency.

2.2. From speech acts to discursive approaches to politeness

Learners' pragmatic abilities have been most often measured by analyzing their performance on speech acts, especially compared to native speaker performance. Knowing which speech act to use when and how is said to be part of a native speaker's pragmatic competence, an intuitive sense that non-native speakers do not have (Cohen, 2008). Modifiers such as ‘perhaps’ or ‘please’ can help reduce the risk of confrontation inherently entailed in communication (Alcón Soler, 2008), but research has found that L2 learners – especially those who learn in a foreign language context – use mitigating devices less frequently and less effectively than native speakers, which may lead to pragmatic breakdown when the speaker sounds overly polite or rude (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001; Kallia, 2005).

Which speech acts are used and how they are realized are often viewed as culture and language specific (Kallia, 2005). For example, the literature on German speech acts shows some similarities and some differences compared to English. In an early study analyzing public directives, Snel-Hornby (1984) found that both languages use adverbial intensifiers and imperatives for commands, but that contexts of use for the imperative are quite divergent, and use different approaches to (in)directness; for example, the inclusive pronouns and infinitives are used in German to avoid directness. Alternately, speech acts can be softened with the use of particles or conditional *if*-/*wenn*-clauses and multi-turn sequences that give both the speaker and the hearer an opportunity to withdraw from an interaction (Taleghani-Nikazm, 2010). Similarly, the subjunctive forms of verbs, and modal particles help mitigate speech acts, while lexical intensifiers, often in conjunction with *bitte* (please), make them more emphatic (Kallia, 2005).

However, the link between language and speech acts is complex (Locher & Watts, 2005). That is, not all speakers of a language or members of a culture use the same speech acts to express their intentions, and speech acts (and their manifestation) may vary depending on dialect or register choice or the speaker's L1. Mills (2011) also notes that speech acts do not have a one-to-one linguistic realization: there is not one way to express a compliment, and not everything that looks like a compliment is actually intended as one by the speaker or interpreted that way by the hearer (e.g., sarcasm or perceived impoliteness). Thus, it might be better not to identify abstract, generalized cultural norms, as they may lead to stereotyping and incorrectly reconfirm “fixed notions of appropriateness” (Mills, 2009: p. 1056). Instead, interactions should be analyzed *in situ*, as collaborative, interpersonal acts that depend on the individuals in a particular interaction (Culpeper, Marti, Mei, Nevala, & Schauer, 2010; Spencer-Oatey, 2002).

This more recent approach to interpreting interactions emphasizes the significance of the local context, including variables such as the personalities of and relationships between interlocutors, the topic or purpose of that interaction, or even its minute-by-minute unfolding (Barron, 2005; Cohen, 2005; Kallia, 2005). The learners' volition also needs to be considered in this framework since they can choose to maintain L1 preferences for politeness regardless of the L2 (Barron, 2005; Cohen, 2005; Kallia, 2005; Washburn, 2001). Dewaele (2008) argues, for example, that even when learners know the "appropriate" L2 forms, they may still choose to flout them, if they want to make a particular point or reject authority. Joking and experimenting is also a key part of L2 learning, and speakers sometimes use alternate forms of the L2 to establish interpersonal relationships through language play (Cook, 2000). Such individual and local variation makes pedagogical implementation rather challenging, as we seek ways to help learners develop the skills necessary for interpreting interactions in a local context.

2.3. Teaching L2 pragmatics

The literature on teaching pragmatics has primarily focused on the nature of learning (i.e., whether it is a cognitive or a sociocognitive process), whether it should be taught explicitly or implicitly, and what should be included in pragmatics instruction. Most early research on pragmatics viewed learning to be an individual, cognitive activity (Jeon & Kaya, 2006), and studies in this paradigm focused on the effects of consciousness raising, noticing, and output. Results mostly showed that explicit instruction facilitates pragmatic development more than either implicit instruction or no instruction, possibly because it helps learners focus on salient features of language and offers a richer environment for acquisition (Halenko & Jones, 2011). Meta-pragmatic knowledge and feedback seem to aid L2 pragmatic development as well (Alcón Soler, 2008; Rose & Kwai-fun, 2001).

Others offer a more qualified review of explicit instruction, noting that what ends up being learned via explicit instruction is not necessarily what the task had intended to teach, and that learners may use the information ineffectively in conversation (Ellis, 2009; Liddicoat & Crozet, 2001). To complicate matters further, Koike and Pearson (2005) found that while explicit instruction led to improved performance on pragmatic judgment tasks, implicit instruction had a more positive impact on pragmatic production on open-ended dialog tasks; thus, types of instruction "may have varying effects on different areas of learner competence" (p. 495).

More recent research (Alcón Soler, 2008; Atkinson, Churchill, Nishino, & Okada, 2007; LoCastro, 2011; Ohta, 2005) examines pragmatics from a sociocognitivist perspective, investigating how L2 learners internalize information through interaction "both with people and with other L2 sources" (Ohta, 2005: p. 506). In this framework, pragmatics instruction usually involves teaching students the skills to analyze language and strategies for learning and using speech acts. Davies (2004), for example, recommends teaching 1) discourse-length language, 2) analytic skills for recognizing language patterns (not a set of facts or rules), 3) situated interpretation, and 4) interaction as novel context (where stereotypical models are not useful). The last two points emphasize the local interpretation of interactions, as a "moment-to-moment... emergent process" that is included in the interpretive process at least as much as broader cultural patterns (Davies, 2004: pp. 210–211). Similarly, Cohen (2005) argues that since native speakers produce different speech acts at different times even in service of the same pragmatic goal, students should learn analytic skills instead of one-size-fits-all responses to situations. These skills should include the ability to compare L1 and L2 realizations of speech acts, research contexts of use, and examine how non-verbal and paralinguistic features of speech acts impact their use and meaning. For example, Spencer-Oatey (2002) suggests tasks that help learners understand the illocutionary and participation domains of language, such as learning strategies for rapport maintenance.

One further issue to consider is that of timing. While most L2 pragmatics research focuses on advanced learners (cf. Jeon & Kaya, 2006), and thus pedagogical implications that emerge from these studies are appropriate for this more advanced population as well, Dewaele (2008) argues that pragmatics should be taught from the beginning because "a basic understanding of the sociolinguistic and sociopragmatic rules governing an interaction [are more important] than the exact knowledge of words and grammar rules" (p. 261).

The threads of L2 pragmatics research discussed above point to key features of successful instruction. First, that awareness raising and explicit instruction seem to facilitate pragmatics learning (albeit explicit and implicit instruction may benefit different types of learning); second, that learning is a sociocognitive phenomenon, whereby individual cognition occurs through interactive, social processes; and third, that analytic skills for identifying and interpreting broader cultural patterns in balance with the local variability of interaction are necessary for developing pragmatic competence, ideally based on discourse length models of various types of interaction.

As the following section demonstrates, films, while not without limitations, can serve as a useful tool for teaching pragmatics to beginning learners, because they include enough context to support analyses at the discourse level, and they can model the use of authentic language that is not typically available in textbooks (Nádasdi, Mougeon, & Rehner, 2005).

2.4. Teaching pragmatics with film

Films are a common staple in the L2 classroom for practicing a wide array of language skills and cultural analysis (Fernández-Guerra, 2008; Kahnke & Stehle, 2011; Rose, 2001; Sundquist, 2010). According to Lay (2009), films have great potential for fostering independent discovery-oriented and intercultural learning, a high level of interactivity, and learning about socially relevant topics. They are also interesting, and thus hence motivating, because they can offer real-life information about current cultural issues and depict characters the students can identify with (Lay, 2009; Tognozzi, 2010; Washburn, 2001). Furthermore, as Lay observes, films model suprasegmental information, such as intonation or turn-

taking, and body language; such contextual cues can help learners develop their awareness of communicative events if they are given tasks that actively engage them in in-depth, critical analysis. However, Goldstein (2010) argues that students should not interpret “texts as sociological documents or as ‘spoketexts’” for entire groups (p. 563) because such an interpretation would disguise intracultural variation and homogenize diverse viewpoints.

While Lay focuses mostly on cultural analysis, films can be used just as effectively for analyzing speakers’ language, specifically pragmatic aspects of language, because films can provide the type of discourse-length, richly contextualized exchanges that Félix-Brasdefer (2007) and Kasper (2006) find essential for meaningful pragmatics instruction. In other words, films may be an ideal medium for teaching students about pragmatic strategies, both for learning and as a springboard for language use (Cohen, 2005; Tatsuki & Nishizawa, 2005).

It is not enough just to provide discourse-length input, however; the type of language films model merits consideration. Kaiser (2009) noted that “good” films allow “native speakers [to] suspend disbelief and accept the language as real” (cited by Tognozzi, p. 72). In fact, in spite of multiple interpretive layers (e.g., language filtered by the author, the screen-writers, the directors and actors), films include “natural speech... [which] compels the teacher to deal with language *as it occurs*, not as it might appear in dialogs scripted for language learners” (Goodwin, 2004: p. 231, emphasis original). Similarly, Saville-Troike (2002) considers texts (and films are a type of text) to be ethnographic, since they “presumably embody some kind of normative idealization” in terms of language use (p. 116).

Instructors need to take further steps to ensure that the language in films they select is, in fact, “valid” (i.e., real-life, authentic): “That is, how well does what characters portrayed in film say represent what real-life characters say in face-to-face encounters?” (Rose, 2001: p. 310). After comparing complimenting behavior in American films and natural data (e.g., gender-distribution and structure), Rose (2001) concluded that discourse in films can be a useful source of pragmatic information for teaching, and that overall “the film data corresponds fairly closely to naturally-occurring speech” (p. 318). Comparisons of peripheral modifiers in TV shows and authentic oral corpora (Fernández-Guerra, 2008) of speech acts in Indian English (Nelson, 1991) and of English speech acts (D’Souza, 1991) all offer evidence that TV shows can reflect valid, naturalistic language. Even soap operas and television dramas have authentic-sounding conversations that are “pragmatically appropriate and imitate real-life language” (Grant & Starks, 2001: p. 49). While Grant and Starks (2001) acknowledge that authentic speech samples would be ideal for teaching pragmatics, they argue that samples of natural data can be difficult to find and record, especially to provide sufficient variation and modeling in register, speaker relationships or interactional constellations (e.g., dyadic v. multi-speaker sequences).

Washburn (2001) specifies that films allow learners to hear and see pragmatics, the rate or volume of speech, a smile or frown that help interpret sociopragmatic aspects of interaction. The author also points out that films may provide better feedback than “authentic” interactions, whose purpose is interpersonal communication and not the fulfillment of pedagogic objectives, since there is typically no feedback from one’s interlocutors regarding mistakes: “When a speaker violates the norms of pragmatic language use, we rarely respond directly to the violation, but cooperate to ignore it, if at all possible. Thus, the language learner who inadvertently violates a pragmatic norm may never realize it” (p. 21). A crucial additional benefit is that filmic materials allow learners to observe L2 pragmatics without the instructor being their “sole supplier, interpreter, and/or judge of pragmatic language use” (Washburn, 2001: p. 26); this is important, as instructors (native speakers of the L2 or not) are not necessarily aware of why they use certain pragmatic features, and they may not be able to interpret contexts of use for their students effectively.

When teaching with filmic materials, Eslami-Rasekh (2005) suggests using activities that help raise students’ awareness of pragmatic features of the L2 and following up with tasks that allow students to practice using these features. She adds that discovery activities let students identify what to look for, formulate and test hypotheses about language use, and become “reflective observers of language use in both [their] L1 and L2” (p. 201).

This is not to say that all films can provide all types of modeling nor that instructors and learners should not be aware of the lenses through which the interactions are processed. However, considering that textbook materials are also filtered, and they are often impoverished in terms of characters, interactional patterns or speakers’ motivation, and that they often rely on the authors’ perception of what native speakers might say in given situations (Cohen, 2005; de Pablos-Ortega, 2011), films are arguably a good supplemental resource for pragmatic analysis and instruction.

3. The present study

3.1. Theoretical and methodological frameworks

This study expands two aspects of interlanguage pragmatics research. First, studies typically compare the performance of L2 learners to native speaker norms (Barron, 2005; Larsen-Freeman, 2007), in spite of evidence that L2 pragmatic competence is difficult to develop. This is especially true in foreign language learning contexts (e.g., American learners of German in the U.S.) where access to authentic input is often very limited (Alcón Soler, 2008; Kasper, 2001). Second, most studies analyze the pragmatic skills of advanced L2 learners, leaving a gap of knowledge regarding the pragmatic development of beginning language learners (Jeon & Kaya, 2006; Tateyama, 2001).

In contrast, this qualitative study analyzes the performance of two groups of first-year language learners to understand their pragmatic development where an authentic feature film provides modeling for pragmatic socialization (Alcón Soler, 2008; Ohta, 2005). Drawing on a sociocognitive framework (Atkinson et al., 2007; Zuengler & Miller, 2006), this paper

examines the contributions of both the individual learner and the pragmatic modeling available in the film, reflecting a mutually reinforcing process between individual cognition and social collaboration vis-à-vis an authentic input source.

3.2. Participants & institutional context

Thirty-seven learners from two first-year German language classes participated in this study at a US public university. Classes met for 70 minutes three days a week during two ten-week quarters (the treatment group in one quarter, the control group a year later). *Deutsch, Na Klar!* and its ancillary materials were used for instruction. Throughout the term, during regular instruction, participants also watched the German film *The Edukators*. This film was selected because the conversations in it reflect varied social roles and offer multiple, age-appropriate iterations of different speech acts and relational work; the film also complements the themes in the textbook, although it is not a part of the textbook. The researcher was also the instructor.

3.3. Research questions

This study seeks answers to two related research questions in order to identify how learners in the two groups express and understand politeness before and after they were exposed to the film's concrete social context and rich character relationships:

1. How did learners, if at all, use the local context provided by the film to help modulate their responses on three discourse prompts (see below)?
2. Is learners' awareness of pragmatics different, based on their responses to a metapragmatic reflection question, before and after the movie?

3.4. Methodology

In order to answer the research questions, learners' responses on two modified discourse completion tasks (DCT) were analyzed. A pre-test was administered during week 2 of instruction, the post-test during week 10. The prompts asked participants to write short dialogs that mirrored interactions available for analysis and reflection in the film (see Table 1). While not ideal for eliciting authentic interaction, written DCTs are often used to collect L2 pragmatics data (Takahashi, 2001) because they are convenient and focused. In spite of their lack of interactivity, they may also offer a more naturalistic reflection of what students can do than spontaneous skits, since it may be difficult to recreate realistic scenarios with appropriate pragmatic variation among peers (Chang, 2010). After each prompt learners were asked to reflect on their responses in English to offer insights into their thinking about linguistic choices they make.

3.5. Instruction

Every Friday for seven weeks, students spent 10–15 minutes watching and 10–15 minutes analyzing segments of *The Edukators*. The control group studied pragmatics to the minimal extent present in the textbook and completed activities to practice vocabulary and check comprehension of the film. In contrast, the treatment group completed exercises exploring the relationship between language and its social implementation.

Following proposals by Davies (2004), Cohen (2005) and Spencer-Oatey (2002), the in-class analytic tasks – which participants completed individually, in pairs or in small groups – drew students' attention to a) context-specific vocabulary, including the concept of register, b) pragmalinguistic features of language (e.g., pronouns, verb forms), and c) sociopragmatic issues (e.g., gender, social distance). The learners also wrote skits by transposing interactions modeled by the movie or the other materials to different contexts (e.g., with their friends, their landlord). The specific tasks that guided the discovery of pragmatic features asked learners to:

- 1) Transpose the “problem” in follow-up dialogs and skits (e.g., resolve a situation with parents or good friends) after watching an interaction on screen.
- 2) Analyze both pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic features of speech acts; learners created a skit or dialog making a request or suggestion, examined how they realized these speech acts, and compared their own realizations with those of the characters. Analysis focused on pragmalinguistic (e.g., register, expressions of politeness) and sociopragmatic features (e.g., directness/indirectness, “appropriate” language, etc.).

Table 1
Pre- and post-viewing prompts.

Prompts	Pre-film DCT	Post-film DCT
1. Making a request of someone in a position of power	A landlord	An uncle with a cabin
2. Declining a friend's suggestion	Request for an inconvenient trip by an insistent partner	Continued illicit activities by a friend
3. Expressing displeasure (speaker in position of power)	A customer in a restaurant	An imperious wife

4. Findings and discussion

4.1. Linguistic tools in beginning language learners' expressions of politeness in context

4.1.1. Mitigating devices

The qualitative analyses of students' responses identified several areas that reflect the treatment group's awareness of and ability to build on the social context provided by the movie. Before discussing specific details, it is important to note that the English translations attempt – to the extent possible – to reflect the lexical, grammatical and pragmatic mistakes students produced in the original German. Where students supplied their own translations of German comments (see 4.2 Meta-pragmatic Discussion), those were used in the analyses below. Elsewhere, the researcher provided translations since learners' intent was mostly inferable, even if not lexically or grammatically accurate.

In the two examples shown below, student 2 (S2) and student 16 (S16) use several different mitigating devices that help soften the rejection of a friend's request (prompt 2) or a request to a person in a position of power (prompt 1). First, while participants' responses before the movie consisted of short declarative statements, on the second DCT they provided elaborations, even making up an excuse for why the characters broke into the uncle's cabin in the Alps. Second, on the second DCT, S2 makes use of the inclusive “we” pronoun to mitigate rejecting the friend's proposal. By including and identifying with the friend, the speaker hopes to soften the effect of the rejection. S2 also phrased the rejection as a question rather than a statement, softening it further. In contrast, the learner's response on the pre-viewing prompt was overly direct and would not be appropriate in a German context, unless as the third or fourth refusal in a lengthier exchange.

	Before viewing	After viewing
2	<i>Ich kann gehe nicht.</i> (I can't go. – Lit: I cannot go [1st per. sg.]) Prompt 2	<i>Wir nicht haben viel Problem jetzt. Können wir entspannen uns?</i> (We not [don't] have many problems now. Could we relax?) Prompt 2
S16	Landlord: <i>Es tut mir leid, aber Sie musts gehen.</i> (I'm sorry, but you have to go) Jule: <i>Aber ich gebe Ihnen die Miete!</i> (but I give [gave] you the rent!) Prompt 1	Jule: <i>Es tut mir leid, aber meine Freunde haben ein Haus gebraucht. Sie sind auf den Berg skifahren und Peter hat die Beine geschmerzt. Hoffentlich verstehen Sie!</i> (I'm sorry but my friends needed a house. They were skiing in the mountains, and Peter [hurt] his legs. I hope you understand!) Prompt 1

As an additional mitigating device, student 16 adds the direct appeal “Hopefully, you understand” to cushion the request made of a relative stranger in a position of power. Arguably, as Clark (2011) posits, individuals are always balancing their own politeness needs against those of a broader community. As she notes, this struggle is ongoing while the individual navigates the demands of particular interactions. This struggle is further exacerbated in early L2 learning by the lack of a repertoire that allows successful navigation. However, learners in this cohort, even at early stages of language learning, made attempts to modify their language when they had a social context to draw on. Since they have an interlocutor – albeit an imaginary one, predetermined by the movie – they try to adapt their language, in spite of limited linguistic skills. Instead of a response to a decontextualized prompt, the “interaction” takes on more dimensions, generating quasi “joint actions” within a better defined, socioculturally organized activity (LoCastro, 2003).

In contrast, only two students in the control group used “es tut mir leid” (I am sorry) on prompt 1 of the post-test, and combined it with explanations:

Student	<i>“Ich bin mit meinem Freunden. Wir reisen, denn wir sind sehr stressig. Es tut mir leid, Onkel. Die Weise ist schön. Alles gut, wir haben kein Problem. Ich hoffe du bist Angst nicht.”</i> (I am with my friends. We are traveling because we are stressful [stressed]. I'm sorry, uncle. The meadow is pretty. Everything good [is going well], we don't have any problem[s]. I hope you are fear not [not worried].) DCT 2 – prompt 1
S30	

Furthermore, only one participant from the control group used the inclusive first-person plural form (prompt 2); most requests were simple assertions, such as “Du bist ein Idiot! Kannst du mich anrufen? Ich bin seine Frau!” (You are an idiot. Can you [not] call me? I am his [your] wife! – S28, post-test, prompt 3).

4.1.2. The pragmatic impact of local lexicon

Lexical nuances contributed further to the overall pragmatic variability of the treatment group on the second DCT. Participants in the treatment group, for example, used lexical items from the movie that were not in other readings to intensify their message, as shown in the responses by Students 16 and 18:

S16	<i>“Diese Leute sind Terroristen! Wir sind nicht Revolutionäre.”</i> (These people are terrorists! We are no[t] revolutionaries.) DCT 2 – prompt 2
S18	<i>“Ich habe auch vor ihnen Angst, weil sie sind gefährlich!”</i> (I am also afraid of them [incorr. word order], because they are dangerous!) DCT 2 – prompt 3

The character speaking in Prompt 3 was not directly shown in the film, just inferred based on phone conversations with the husband, a main character, and his comments about her. According to this evidence, though, she appeared to be wealthy, domineering and intolerant. Using terms such as “terrorists” and “revolutionaries” would fit in well with her character’s implied attributes, and shows that learners intentionally employ hyperbole to portray her. Learners also seemed to absorb multi-word units, such as “to be afraid of,” that are often used in everyday German interactions but may be difficult to learn (Nation, 2001) and are often taught later in the curriculum as grammatical constructs (e.g., verbs with prepositions). Thus, the film-based lexicon helped students express pragmatic nuance that reflected the personality traits and emotional states of actual or implied characters in the film.

In a similar vein, learners in the treatment group also included terms of address to create an explicit link with their audience, describing the relationship between the speaker and the hearer or using the addressee’s name. For example, the second-person pronoun helped distance the speaker from his audience (as in “*du... Idiot*” [you idiot]), whereas the inclusive plural pronoun “*wir*” (we) was used to express rapport: “*Wir nicht haben viele Problem jetzt. Können wir entspannen uns?*” (We not [don’t] have many problems now. Can we relax? – S2, post-test prompt 2). Learners also frequently pre-framed their requests, predominantly by overusing the phrase “*Tut mir leid*” (I’m sorry). This phrase served to protect both the speaker’s and the hearer’s face, for example on prompt 2 of the post-test, where the three protagonists discuss whether to continue their “lessons”: “*Peter: Ja, tuts mir leid Jan, aber Jule ist richtig, und Ich liebe ihr so ich will was sie willt.*” (Peter: Yes, I’m sorry Jan, but Jule is right [incorrect idiom used], and I love her [poss. adj.], so I want what she want[s]. – S3).

In contrast, only one participant in the control group used a term of address (“*Onkel*” (uncle) – prompt 1), and only two students included a direct address on prompt 3 of the post-test, which elicited emotionally escalated language; however, both of these are hyperbolic to the point of inappropriateness: “*Schwein!*” (pig) and “*Hardenberg!*” both addressing the husband.

4.1.3. Coordination and subordination for explanations and explication

The data reveals grammatical nuances among the treatment group participants after viewing as well, although knowing when to use certain structures did not always lead to accurate implementation. The changes primarily reflected the use of grammatical constructions covered in the course: modal verbs, prepositions, the conversational past, personal pronouns, and conjunctions. Interestingly, while coordinating conjunctions had been part of the curriculum the previous quarter, only three (“*aber*” [but], “*und*” [and], and “*oder*” [or]) were used on the first DCT,² in 38 (27%) of the 139 total c-units.³ In lieu of connecting ideas, students used simple sentence sequences, such as “*Kommst du mit mich nach Costa Rica. Ich zahle alle deine Ausgabe. Du müsst gehen!*” (Come with me [incorrect case] to Costa Rica. I [will] pay all your expenses. You must go [spelling mistake]! – S14, pre-test prompt 2). In contrast, both coordinating and subordinating conjunctions were used more frequently on the post-test in the treatment group; they were included in 55 of the 187 c-units (or 29.5%). The three coordinating conjunctions used on the pre-test (“*aber*” (but) 15 times, “*und*” (and) 29 times, “*oder*” (or) twice) were among these responses as well, but participants expanded their repertoire and used more diverse conjunctions: “*warum*” (why), “*weil*” (because), “*wo*” (where), “*sondern*” (but rather), “*dass*” (that) and “*wie*” (how). Five c-units included more than one conjunction, for example the comment by student 1 on the first prompt from the second DCT: “*meine Freunde und ich Urlaub machen, weil sind wir schlecht und der Arzt verschreiben sich die Luft in die Alpen.*” (my friends and I go [were] on vacation, because we were bad [unwell], and the doctor prescribed himself [us] the air in the Alps).

Conversely, students in the control group used only three coordinating conjunctions in total on the post-test: “*Wir lieben das Idee. Aber, möchten wir nicht helfen.*” (We love the idea. But, we not [don’t] want help [infinitive instead of noun]. – S27, prompt 2) and “*Wir reisen, denn wir sind sehr stressig*” (We are traveling because we are stressful [stressed]. – S30, prompt 1). Amongst all the responses, only one subordinating conjunction was used, by student 32 on prompt 1: “*Ich brauche helfen. Ich brauchte eine Hause weil die Polizei möchten mir. Es tut mir leid.*” (I need to help [help]. I needed a house [incorr. gender] because the police want me [incorr. case]. I’m sorry.).

Conjunctions can be important pragmatic tools because they link ideas and explicate arguments. They can also help increase the level of politeness or intensify a request by lending weight to the speaker’s proposition, as the following comparison of student 11 illustrates:

	Before viewing	After viewing
S11	“Bring ein neu Glas! Mein Glas ist schmutzig!” (Bring a new glass! My glass is dirty! – prompt 3)	“Ich habe keine Ahnung, <u>warum</u> du nichts sagst. Du bist ein Hardenberg <u>und</u> du hast nichts getan.” (I don’t know why you don’t [didn’t] say anything. You are a Hardenberg, and yet you didn’t do anything! – prompt 3)

² On the pre-test, students used “*aber*” (but) 25 times, in 25 different c-units, “*und*” (and) 7 times, in seven different c-units, and “*oder*” (or) 6 times in six different c-units.

³ C-units, communicative units, were used for analysis because they include ‘casual’ phrases, which might be grammatically incomplete but are communicatively significant in everyday conversation (Crookes, 1990).

On these prompts, participants had to make their displeasure known. The “speaker” was a female in a position of power, speaking to someone she deemed “inferior,” socially and relationally. The elaboration in the second response was made more direct and urgent with the conjunctions “warum” (why) and “und” (and); the former emphasizes the cause for the speaker’s “confusion,” while the latter shows the contrast that provides the sarcastic, belittling impact that the student says in the meta-question he wanted to express: “she is mad and doesn’t respect him because he’s too weak.” None of the participants in the control group offered such elaborations.

4.1.4. Discussion: linguistic tools for expressing politeness

While making the claim cautiously, given the small-scale and qualitative nature of the present study, participants in the treatment group were better able to connect the pragmalinguistic features of language to appropriate sociopragmatic contexts. Their responses indicate that they were able to use the filmic material to increase pragmatic nuance. However, while learners in the treatment group made important gains between the two DCTs in their ability to communicate the illocutionary force behind their utterances, there were several ways in which pragmatic instruction did not meet expectations. First, while the movie dialogs contained modal particles (e.g., “doch” or “wirklich” ~ “come on” or “really”), which help soften or intensify utterances in German, learners did not include any in their responses. The reason for this could be that instruction did not focus on these particles explicitly; rather they were included more generally in analyzing the sociopragmatic context of exchanges. And as others have noted, if a pragmatic point is not dealt with explicitly, learners might not attend to it sufficiently enough to incorporate it in their productive skills (Rose & Kwai-fun, 2001).

Second, similar to Ellis’ (2009) and Liddicoat and Crozet’s (2001) findings, what learners noticed or picked up was not necessarily what they had actually been taught. For example, some students used the formal form between participants in “inappropriate” contexts, one claiming that Mr. and Mrs. Hardenberg would use formal forms “because he is the man of the upper-class household and ‘deserves’ respect even if [the wife] thinks he’s stupid.” (S1, post-test, prompt 3), although this conclusion was not supported by information provided in the textbook or during classroom discussions. Finally, despite discussions about the multi-turn nature of most interactions, few participants wrote extended dialogs, writing instead single statements or short dialogs that consisted of only one turn by each participant. This may be due to the artificiality of the task; students could take on one role of the dialog, but not speak for two or more characters. Alternately, participants’ language skills may not be sufficient for extended spontaneous dialogs.

4.2. Reflections on learners’ metapragmatic explanations

The metapragmatic contributions on the post-test revealed further interesting insights and clear differences between the control and treatment groups. On the pretest, only five participants (3 from the control group, 2 from the treatment group) responded to the meta-pragmatic prompts, but all five students merely translated their dialogs into English. On the second DCT, in contrast, everyone responded, albeit with great variation in quality.

To begin, on the post-test only four participants in the control group provided metapragmatic comments on their choices. Specifically, three students explained that they would use the informal form with friends or a spouse, and student 27 added an explanation on prompt 3 that he wanted to show how mad Mrs. Hardenberg was, for which he used an exclamation point. Student 28 went into more depth, offering a pragmatic explanation for his choices: “I am not well-versed enough in German... I would phrase it such that Peter expresses exhaustion and cannot handle the prospect of spreading this message. Jule on the other hand, would still express “some’ excitement.” However, the only German sentence this participant wrote was “Peter: *Wir sind das Ende*.” (Peter: We are the end [we are done] – prompt 2). All other students either offered only literal translations of their German utterances into English or metalinguistic comments on grammatical choices they made without connecting the form to any pragmatic function (e.g., “modal verbs take the infinitive” or “I didn’t know how to use the distant past”).

This is significantly different from comments made by the treatment group on the post-test. Only two students in the treatment group provided translations of their German responses, and only three made metalinguistic comments (e.g., not knowing how to form the past subjunctive). The other learners, however, reflected on the pragmatic choices they had made. These reflections indicated an awareness of both pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic features of German. Several students remarked, for example, that using direct language – an explanation without apology, the informal pronoun “du” (you) – with the uncle is most appropriate, since he is a close relative of Jule (e.g., “It is simple and direct. Some explanation but not too much detail.” S1 – prompt 1). Participants also noted affiliation by using the pronoun “wir” (we) intentionally when trying to reject Jan’s calls for further revolutionary activity, in order to “be sensitive and care about Jan, but still make the right decisions for [themselves]” (S3, prompt 2).

Students also confirmed that they were intentionally direct when expressing anger: “Peter probably isn’t too happy with Jan considering [Peter’s girlfriend’s desertion], so he’s a bit more forward” (S15, prompt 2). In particular, prompt 3 on the second DCT participants explored different pragmatic tools to reflect their characterization of Mrs. Hardenberg, such as various punctuation marks (!!! or ?!), ridicule (“...du schläfst wie ein Baby mit ihr.” [...you sleep with them like a baby. – S3), taunting (“*Du bist ein schade Mann* ...” [you are a pitiful man ... – S4]), and challenging (“*Bist du ein bisschen sympathisch? Diese Leute sind Kriminellen?*” [probably: You sympathize with them? Aren’t these people criminals? – S10]).

Several participants in the treatment group, but only one in the control group, also noted that their language was too limited for the nuance they wanted to express: “The statement is phrased this way simply because this is what I can formulate with my minimal language ability” (S4, prompt 1) or “I wanted to say more specific things but my vocabulary is not good

enough yet!!! I tried to just use some “du” form suggestions and commands” (S19, prompt 3). These comments were only made on the post-test, suggesting an *awareness* of the link between language form, pragmatic intent and the social context of the interaction, although students could not yet implement them reliably and effectively.

5. Conclusion

Learning the norms of speech communities is a lengthy process (Ochs & Schieffelin, 2010), and how best to guide L2 learners through this process needs further research, especially in the foreign language context, where pragmatic input is less readily available. Ohta (2005) suggests utilizing L2 artifacts as a spring-board for socialization. The data in this study supports previous findings (Alcón Soler, 2008; Rose, 2005; Washburn, 2001) that films can offer such a spring-board, through richly contextualized discourse-length language samples that allow pragmatic scaffolding. Specifically, using the film as a pragmatic resource seems to have helped learners in this study to note the purpose of conversations, expressions of agreement and disagreement, expressions of emotion, and how to observe and flout social norms in some conversations. Most importantly, the movie helped focus learners' attention on the locally situated nature of interaction (Mills, 2009) by creating a concrete, if imaginary, context for their responses. Instead of presenting “Germans” as a homogeneous group, this film also helped learners identify a particular woman, her relationship to her husband, and the way she talks to him because of her personality, wealth, among other factors. Students also recognized patterns of interaction within a group of young people, who, guided by their sociopolitical agenda, used language in particular ways. Analyzing interaction locally can help prevent learners from “falling prey to large scale generalizations about all of the individuals in a particular language group or culture” (Mills, 2009: p. 1057).

This was a small-scale, qualitative study, therefore generalizable claims were not the objective. Instead, it aimed to identify some linguistic tools that beginning language learners have at their disposal after watching a film that served as a “native informant.” While learners' linguistic repertoire was limited at this stage of development, and effective pragmatic intent was only partially realized, participants offered more lexically and grammatically nuanced language after working with this contextually rich, discourse-length pragmatic resource.

This study also lays the foundation for future research to explore the early development of L2 pragmatics. Studies that measure learners' performance against idealized native speaker norms delegate L2 output to de facto deficiency status (Mills, 2011). Further research should look at the nuanced pragmatic abilities L2 learners have at different stages of development by measuring their performance between their earlier and later selves instead of against native speaker performance. Since few learners reach native-like skills (Jen & Kaya, 2006), it would be more useful to identify what learners are capable of, and how to utilize their capabilities to meet the dynamic demands of interaction more and more effectively (Bella, 2012; Young & Miller, 2004), including when and how to flout L2 practices and what the consequences of rejecting them may be (Kallia, 2005), especially given learners' predilection for playing with language (Cook, 2000). Research should also identify how different filmic resources (e.g., feature films, TV series, cartoons, etc.) can help teach informal language whose production and comprehension comprise an important part of L2 pragmatic competence (Nádasdi et al., 2005).

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