

INTRODUCTION¹

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1.1 Pragmatic skills and L2 language proficiency

Pragmatics investigates the ability to express and recognise communicative intentions, the ability to convey and interpret meanings in addition to, or beyond, what is literally stated, and the ability to vary one's interactional behaviour according to context (e.g. Bachman, 1990). Pragmatics analyses how people use verbal and nonverbal communicative resources (e.g. lexis, meanings, structures, prosody, gestures and facial expressions) to interact with one another; it examines how the use of these correlate with contextual, especially social, variables; and it explores how these affect the participants involved. More generally, pragmatics investigates communication: how it takes place across contexts, why it has the characteristics that it has, why it may succeed or misfire, what social effects it brings about, and what its cultural import may be for members of given communities of practice (Crystal, 1997).

Pragmatic skills can thus be defined as the ability to use language in real life. Such skills involve, first of all, awareness of the social-contextual constraints on communication relevant to members of a linguo-cultural group. These are the rules of “how-to-say-what-to-whom-when” (Bardovi-Harlig, 2013, 68), which make up sociopragmatics. Pragmatic skills also comprise knowledge of the linguistic resources that enable people to communicate, that is, the lexical, morphological, syntactic phraseologies, semantic and nonverbal conventions that hold in a given community. Familiarity and confidence with these resources form pragmalinguistics (Leech, 1983; Thomas, 1983). The sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic aspects of communication are of course intertwined, and together they contribute to determining variable degrees of communicative adequacy.

¹ The first author wrote Section 1.1, whereas Section 1.2 was written by the three authors together.

That pragmatic skills are crucial to communication has been repeatedly pointed out (e.g., Bachman, 1990; Canale and Swain, 1980; Hymes, 1972). This becomes apparent when rules of interactional conduct are violated and/or when communicative intentions are not encoded in conventional ways – communicative events may be perceived as defective in their acceptability and/or effectiveness. This in turn may give rise to communication breakdowns, in the form of miscommunication (i.e. misinterpretation of – or disagreement over – content, communicative intent and/or intended effect)² and social friction (i.e. negative judgements, impressions or reactions; e.g. Thomas, 1983). If an addressee is, or feels, antagonised by the sender’s less-than-ideal, or at least unexpected, communicative choices (e.g. Wolfe et al., 2016), the negative consequences experienced may go beyond bad feelings, affecting the sender (i.e. the party “guilty of misdemeanour”) in tangible ways (e.g. loss of business; see Sirikhan and Prapphal, 2011, 74).

Unfortunately, it is precisely in properly handling pragmatic aspects of communication that language learners encounter difficulties. Indeed, learners’ pragmatic competence often lags behind grammatical competence (Olshtain and Blum-Kulka, 1985). This also applies to learners at an advanced proficiency level (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989, 10), who may find it challenging to deal with the pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic dimensions of communication (Sirikhan and Prapphal, 2011, 91), or be slow to develop their pragmatic skills (Taguchi, 2011b)³. The main reason for this is that students “have not mastered the unwritten specific rules of these communicative events” (Al-Ali, 2006, 119), that is, they are not familiar with the socio-cultural norms that speakers of the target language “instinctively” abide by, or they are not sensitive enough to the value that native speakers attach to these norms.

Pragmatic skills do not develop spontaneously in the L2 (Schmidt, 1993; Hacking, 2008; Taguchi, 2011b; Thomas, 1983, 109) and mere exposure to the target language – what Hacking (2008, 117) calls “unstructured input” – is not enough. Therefore, a need is felt for instruction in pragmatics (e.g. Bardovi-Harlig, 2001). Research has shown that pragmatic instruction is beneficial for L2 learners’ productive and receptive skills (e.g. House, 1996;

² Different groups of people may motivate the production of given utterances with different reasons, and thus give different evaluations of the people who produce them (e.g. Schauer, 2017, 222).

³ Interestingly, while some studies suggest there may be no correlation between language proficiency and pragmatic competence (e.g. Farashaiyan and Hua, 2012), others provide evidence in support of such a correlation (Xu et al., 2009; Taguchi, 2011a).

Eslami and Eslami-Rasekh, 2008; Koike and Pearson, 2005). However, some caveats need to be kept in mind: different teaching strategies may be required depending on what aspects of pragmatics are taught (Sykes, 2010, 255); the effects of pragmatic instruction may vary depending on which specific areas of learner competence are targeted (Koike and Pearson, 2020, 495); and long-term effects are more uncertain than short-term ones (e.g. Koike and Pearson, 2005).

The relevance of pragmatics to L2 pedagogy has consequently sparked scholars' interest in the assessment of pragmatic aspects of learners' interlanguage (Timpe Laughlin et al., 2015), intended as the use and development of "linguistic action patterns" (Kasper and Blum-Kulka, 1993, 3) in the target language. The recent research into the assessment of pragmatic skills has led to the design, field-testing and administration of various types of tests (for a review, see Roever, 2011, 465-470). Insights have been gained relevant both to language teaching/learning in general (e.g. Koike and Pearson, 2005; Roever, 2005, 2006, 2007) and to Language for Specific Purposes educational contexts, in particular, such as in business education (e.g. Hairston, 1981; Hendriks, 2010; Sirikhan and Prapphal, 2011; Wolfe et al., 2016).

However, this research domain has not reached its full maturity (Sydorenko et al., 2014, 20). For one thing, more analyses need to be carried out of pragmatic skills in extended discourse and of the effects of discourse on the addressee (Roever, 2011, 470). Also, more assessment procedures and instruments for classroom use need to be designed and field-tested (Ishihara, 2009). Finally, the studies so far reported are not easily comparable, because they differ in several respects: for instance, (the labelling of) the assessment criteria adopted; the assessment procedures implemented (e.g. qualitative, quantitative); the phenomena chosen as the focus of assessment (e.g. speech acts, inferential skills); the data collection procedures implemented (e.g. elicited vs spontaneously produced discourse); and finally, the rationale for assessing pragmatic skills assessment (e.g. research-oriented vs classroom-oriented). This last point deserves some comments.

Research-oriented assessment of language in use aims to account for how the interactions among the various linguistic resources used by communication participants affect context, or are affected by it, to variable degrees of adequacy. Classroom-oriented assessment of language in use has to go one step further, as it can have important implications for the stakeholders involved. In an educational context, assessment is a consequential act with a gate-keeping function. For this reason, it is necessary to design assessment procedures that are valid (accurate), useful for the present (informative) and future (instructive) pedagogical practice, and acceptable

(fair, motivated) and potentially rewarding (motivating and stimulating) for their learners.

Assessment research can be relevant to pedagogy and feed into it (e.g. Chen and Liu, 2016; Ishihara, 2010). Ultimately, it should help learners prioritise their learning (cf. Sydorenko et al., 2014, 21, 36). This may require bringing a simulation of real-world assessment into the classroom context (e.g. Wolfe et al., 2016, 412), so that learners become aware that inappropriate behaviour is costly (Sirikhan and Prapphal, 2011, 91). Such an approach may comprise exploring how well learners' goals and intentions are correctly interpreted by their interlocutors (Spencer-Oatey, 2007; e.g. Ishihara, 2010). In an assessment situation, this might involve the rater explaining what impressions s/he forms of the learners and their texts, and also how s/he would react to the texts (e.g. Hermanno, 2009). Ideally, this kind of assessment should avoid prescriptivism, which dictates how to behave (Sykes, 2010, 258), and instead aim to refine learners' metapragmatic awareness so that they knowingly express themselves in the way they really want to (Thomas, 1983, 91).

The present publication contributes to illustrating how pragmatic proficiency and its assessment are crucial to the development of communicative, interactional and more generally social competence.

1.2 Overview of the volume

The studies included in this volume address pragmatic aspects of L2 communication, taking into account the complementary perspectives of researchers, language practitioners and learners. These were carried out with qualitative and quantitative methods in different linguo-cultural contexts spanning from Norway through Croatia and Italy to Canada and Colombia. This volume offers innovative, non-traditional approaches to pragmatics teaching and assessment, while maintaining an expanded perspective on pragmatics knowledge from a verbal and nonverbal point of view.

With “‘This Other Stuff’: What do Croatian EFL Teacher Trainees Know about L2 Pragmatics?”, Danijela Šegedin Borovina and Mirjana Semren open the volume by venturing into the under-researched area of foreign language teachers' background in pragmatics. The authors explored Croatian EFL teacher trainees' experience of pragmatics instruction, perception of pragmatics, and knowledge of L2 pragmatics. By means of a video-and-questionnaire error-recognition task administered to 32 participants, and semi-structured interviews carried out with nine of them, they investigated whether EFL student teachers were able to identify

pragmatic and grammatical violations in pre-recorded scenarios, and to explain the reasons for pragmatic violations. The teacher trainees were less successful in recognizing pragmatic infelicities than ungrammatical items, revealed limited knowledge of L2 pragmatics and L2 pragmatics teaching, and could not offer suggestions on how to teach L2 pragmatics in a foreign language classroom. All of this could be attributed to the emphasis on grammatical accuracy experienced throughout their English language learning. At the same time, the trainee teachers appeared to have developed a certain degree of pragmatic awareness, but mainly through their workplace experiences, and finally, they considered pragmatic competence more important than grammar, probably because sensitized to this matter by their cultural experiences and the focus of the interview. The conclusion drawn is that, to be prepared to teach L2 pragmatics, EFL trainee teachers need pragmatics-oriented courses covering key theoretical concepts and promoting the development of practical skills oriented towards L2 pragmatics teaching.

The chapter by Sara Gesuato and Erik Castello, "Pragmatics at University Level? A Survey of Italian EFL Students' Perceived Instructional Experience and Learning Goals", reports on the administration of an online survey to 109 undergraduate EFL students at the University of Padua, Italy, which explored students' awareness of received instruction in pragmatics and their learning goals in English for General Purposes courses. The focus of the questionnaire was on nine initiating speech acts and ten responding ones likely to be taught in EFL language classes, plus nine teaching methods/materials that language teachers are likely to employ when teaching about language use. The majority of the survey respondents expressed awareness of having received instruction in pragmatics, but more frequently about initiating speech acts than responding ones. They also stated that they wished they could receive more instruction about such face-threatening speech acts as complaints, rejecting/refusing and apologies, while expressing less interest in face-sustaining ones like greetings, responses to greetings and responses to offers. The students also reported that the most extensively used teaching method was feedback on correctness, and that what they particularly desired in teaching was a focus on the effects of their discourse; on the other hand, they indicated only mild appreciation for role-plays as a teaching strategy. Interviews conducted with five survey respondents revealed similar preferences. The authors argue that these findings lend support to the view that pragmatics should play a more prominent role in the design of English for General Purposes teaching syllabi.

Giuliana Salvato's chapter, "Assessing Verbal and Nonverbal Immediacy in University Classes in Canada and in Italy", presents data collected at a Canadian and at an Italian university where 200 students of English linguistics were asked to respond to a series of statements describing their professors' verbal and nonverbal behaviours. The statements originate in the tradition of research that investigates immediacy within educational settings. As a concept borrowed from social psychology and later adopted by communication studies, immediacy refers to the verbal and nonverbal behaviours that can help interlocutors decrease physical and psychological distance between them during interaction. Within educational settings, immediacy is expected to decrease distance between teachers and students, and, consequently, to increase students' motivation and commitment to learning. Salvato's work confirms previous findings, particularly the fact that immediacy is a culturally sensitive concept. The author used a scale developed in Sino-speaking cultures to report statistically significant differences between Canada and Italy, and to compare her data with the results obtained at the University of Hong Kong on the same scale (López-Ozieblo, 2015). Across the three cultures, Salvato found that sometimes Canada and Italy shared similar traits; at other times, Italy stood closer to Hong Kong in the delineation of a more distant instructor compared to Canada. One aspect that stood out across the three contexts was nonverbal behaviour such as walking around the classroom. This was an important trait contributing to making Canadian students perceive their professors as immediate, whereas it was not so to the same extent in Italy and even less so in Hong Kong. This study demonstrates that assessing the verbal and nonverbal aspects that contribute to immediacy between students and instructors helps identify the traits of an effective, credible, and appreciated instructor. When carried out across different educational settings and with speakers of a variety of backgrounds, this type of work advances research in cross-cultural and intercultural pragmatics.

Diana Peppoloni's chapter, "Gestures in Language Teaching and Learning: How German Learners of Italian Recognise Emblems", is focused on culturally defined gestures, technically known as emblems. With the aim of finding pedagogical practices that enhance learners' communicative competence, the author offers a qualitative analysis of Italian learners' gestural competence along with their evaluation of their teachers' gesture usage. The reason is that, while combining with speech, emblems and other gestures may not be understood in their meaning and function, if interlocutors do not share the same cultural background. In order to explore her research questions, Peppoloni distributed a survey to 40 adult German learners of Italian at a B1 proficiency level in Italy and in Germany.

Participants were asked to define 20 Italian emblematic gestures that had been selected on the basis of their frequency in manuals of Italian language and in videos included in the CLODIS corpus (University of Siena). Participants were also asked whether they used those gestures, how frequently, and whether their teachers used the same gestures during class and discussed their relevance in Italian communication. Peppoloni found that context and teachers' linguistic and cultural background do influence learner comprehension and production of emblems. As the author explains, an advantage in gesture comprehension and production depends on whether the target language is spoken outside the classroom, and whether the teacher is a native speaker of Italian. This study highlights the value of investigating L2 gestures to elucidate the factors that contribute to their understanding as well as their acquisition. Moreover, this study suggests that, when language pedagogy addresses target nonverbal aspects of communication, it promotes intercultural competence and understanding.

In their cross-linguistic and cross-cultural study, entitled "Declining an Invitation: The Pragmatics of Italian and Colombian Spanish", Diego Cortés Velásquez and Elena Nuzzo compared the locutionary acts of declining undesired invitations made by inviters characterized by different degrees of social distance from their interlocutors. The authors also analyzed the perlocutionary acts of invitations which had been formally accepted. They administered a multiple-choice Discourse Completion Task questionnaire to 63 Colombians and 63 Italians so as to identify their pragmalinguistic preferences and sociopragmatic expectations. The findings revealed partial differences between the two groups: in the performance of the speech act, the Colombians showed a preference for the use of mitigated refusals, and the Italians for the strategy of demurral, that is, for postponing a response with an indefinite reply. Additionally, the Colombians were more likely than the Italians to expect invitees not to show up at the events these had been invited to, whereas the Italians expected invitees to produce cancellations, either with advance notice or at the last minute, more often than the Colombians. The study suggests that Colombians, like other South-Americans, are more oriented toward the positive-politeness end of the positive-negative politeness continuum than Italians. The authors concluded by discussing pedagogical implications based on these findings.

Fiona Dalziel's chapter, "'Try to Say Things Straight, without Being Offensive, Obviously': Investigating the Pragmatics of Online Peer Review", explores the pragmatic strategies employed by foreign language learners in writing reviews of their peers' written production. The study is based on a corpus of 170 online peer review messages written by students attending an English for Academic Purposes module at the University of Padua, Italy,

between 2015 and 2017. The corpus also contains some of the students' replies to a task on good peer reviewing. A quantitative and qualitative content analysis was carried out. The results showed that the vast majority of the comments included a combination of both compliments and criticisms, co-deployed to mitigate the possible attack they could cause to the positive face of the peers receiving a review. They also revealed that the learners used a variety of negative politeness strategies to limit their imposition on their interlocutors when providing recommendations on how to improve their writing (e.g. parenthetical verbs with first person pronouns, modal verbs and the verb *suggest*) and also to reduce the intensity of their critical remarks and place themselves at a distance from their addressee (e.g. avoidance of the second-person pronoun). Overall, the findings suggest that peer writing activities can foster learner reflection and critical thinking not only on argumentative writing per se, but also on the handling of interpersonal relationships.

Silje Normand's chapter, "I like Understood it When we Did it': Eliciting Young L2 Learners' Metapragmatic Awareness of Apologies through *Drama Tableaux*", focuses on *drama tableaux* as an instrument for eliciting pragmatic and metapragmatic data in language pedagogy. The author explored pragmatic features and metapragmatic awareness of apologies produced by 58 young Norwegian EFL learners, aged 8, 10, and 12. In drama tableaux, the body is used to create a three-dimensional image of a frozen moment in time that can be brought to life through the processes known as dynamization (adding movement or speech) and thought-tracking (voicing the tableaux participants' thoughts or feelings). While apologies have been elicited using drama strategies such as closed and open role-plays, Normand argues that drama tableaux have not previously been employed to elicit apologies or as an instrument for pragmatics instruction and classroom-based assessment, especially when working with young L2 learners. By including a range of data elicitation tasks, Normand's study proved that drama tableaux are an effective and engaging means of eliciting data from young learners with varied preferences, competencies and L2 language proficiencies. The value of the drama tableaux resided in the opportunity to combine the verbalisation of English apology strategies and the metapragmatic discussions on linguistic and contextual factors, with participants' nonverbal responses, such as physical representations and choice of emoticon colours. Such nonverbal behaviours allowed learners to embody and reflect on the paralinguistic features of apologies in English L2 and enabled collaborative responses.

Anna De Marco and Emanuela Paone's chapter, "Pitch Range Variations in L2 Italian Learners' and Native Speakers' Apologies", concludes the

volume with the examination of pitch variations in expressions of apologies made by native and non-native speakers of Italian. Their corpus consisted of 20 dialogues elicited from 10 native speakers of Italian and another 20 dialogues elicited from 10 Spanish learners of Italian by means of four role-plays. The role-plays scenarios were set in various contexts and involved pairs of interlocutors with varying degree of social distance between them. The authors carried out an acoustic analysis of fundamental frequency and pitch range variations of the statements expressing explicit apologies uttered during the role-plays. The results suggest that the native speakers of Italian varied their pitch according to the scenario and the social distance, using higher pitch in interactions with intimate people. By contrast, the apologies produced by the non-native speakers did not show any variation in pitch height or range across the interactions they engaged in. Also, their pitch range was not as wide as that of the native speakers. The authors argue that Spanish speakers of Italian may need to improve their ability to modulate the intensity of their prosody according to social and contextual variables.

We trust that these chapters shed light into how the results of pragmatic investigations can be fruitfully applied to language teaching at primary and tertiary educational level. We expect that the findings reported here will be of interest to both younger and experienced scholars who want to engage in further explorations of such topics.

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