

1 *Pragmatics in language teaching*

Gabriele Kasper and Kenneth R. Rose

Introduction

By such milestones as the appearance of the Threshold Level for English (Van Ek, 1975) and Wilkins's Notional Syllabus (1976), communicative language teaching (CLT) has been with us for nearly three decades. A strong theoretical impetus for the development of CLT came from the social sciences and humanities outside language pedagogy. Different notions of communicative competence, proposed by Hymes from the perspective of linguistic anthropology (1971) and by Habermas (1984) from the vantage point of social philosophy, served as guiding constructs for the design of communicative competence as the overall goal of language teaching and assessment. An influential and comprehensive review of communicative competence and related notions was offered by Canale and Swain (1980), who also proposed a widely cited framework of communicative competence for language instruction and testing. While pragmatics does not figure as a term among their three components of communicative competence (grammatical, sociolinguistic, and strategic competence), pragmatic ability is included under "sociolinguistic competence," called "rules of use." Canale (1983) expanded the earlier version of the framework by adding discourse competence as a fourth component. A decade after the original framework had been published, Bachman (1990, pp. 87ff.) suggested a model of communicative ability that not only includes pragmatic competence as one of the two main components of "language competence," parallel to "organizational competence," but subsumes "sociolinguistic competence" and "illocutionary competence" under pragmatic competence. The prominence of pragmatic ability has been maintained in a revision of this model by Bachman and Palmer (1996, pp. 66ff.).

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Defining pragmatics

What exactly is the communicative ability that has gained such attention in second language pedagogy? Pragmatics has been defined in various ways, reflecting authors' theoretical orientation and audience. A definition that appeals to us, not least for its usefulness for second language pedagogy, has been offered by Crystal (1997, p. 301), who proposes that pragmatics is "the study of language from the point of view of users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction and the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication." In other words, pragmatics is defined as the study of communicative action in its sociocultural context. Communicative action includes not only using speech acts (such as apologizing, complaining, complimenting, and requesting), but also engaging in different types of discourse and participating in speech events of varying length and complexity. Following Leech (1983), this book will focus on pragmatics as interpersonal rhetoric – the way speakers and writers accomplish goals as social actors who do not just need to get things done but must attend to their interpersonal relationships with other participants at the same time.

As a means of mapping out the relevant territory for the study of how people accomplish their goals and attend to interpersonal relationships while using language, Leech (1983) and Thomas (1983) divided pragmatics into two components: *pragmalinguistics* and *sociopragmatics*. *Pragmalinguistics* refers to the resources for conveying communicative acts and relational or interpersonal meanings. Such resources include pragmatic strategies such as directness and indirectness, routines, and a large range of linguistic forms which can intensify or soften communicative acts. For one example, compare these two versions of an apology: the terse *Sorry* versus the Wildean *I'm absolutely devastated – could you possibly find it in your heart to forgive me?* In both versions, the speaker chooses from among the available pragmalinguistic resources of English which serve the function of apologizing (which would also include other items, such as *It was my fault* or *I won't let it happen again*), but she indexes a very different attitude and social relationship in each of the apologies (e.g., Fraser, 1981; House & Kasper, 1981a; Brown & Levinson, 1987; Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989), which is where *sociopragmatics* comes into the picture. *Sociopragmatics* has been described by Leech (1983, p. 10) as "the sociological interface of pragmatics," referring to the social perceptions underlying participants' interpretation and performance of communicative action. Speech communities differ in their assessment of speakers' and hearers' social distance and social power, their rights and obligations, and the degree of imposition involved in particular communicative acts (Blum-Kulka &

House, 1989; Olshain, 1989; Takahashi & Beebe, 1993; Kasper & Rose, 1999, for review). The values of context factors are negotiable; they are subject to change through the dynamics of conversational interaction, as captured in Fraser's (1990) notion of the "conversational contract" and in Myers-Scotton's Markedness Model (1993). As Thomas (1983) points out, although pragmalinguistics is, in a sense, akin to grammar in that it consists of linguistic forms and their respective functions, sociopragmatics is very much about proper social behavior, making it a far more thorny issue to deal with in the classroom – it is one thing to teach people what functions bits of language serve, but it is entirely different to teach people how to behave "properly." Here learners must be made aware of the consequences of making pragmatic choices, but the choice to act a certain way should be theirs alone (Siegal, 1994, 1996).

Pragmatics in language teaching

In many second and foreign language teaching contexts, curricula and materials developed in recent years include strong pragmatic components or even adopt a pragmatic approach as their organizing principle. A number of proposals for instruction in different aspects of pragmatic competence are now based on empirical studies of native speaker (NS) discourse, on both NS and interlanguage material, or on the classic set of comparable interlanguage, L1 and L2 data. Examples of target-based teaching proposals for L2 English are Holmes and Brown (1987) on complimenting, Myers-Scotton and Bernsten (1988) on conversational structure and management, and Bardovi-Harlig, Hartford, Mahan-Taylor, Morgan, and Reynolds (1991) on conversational closings. Proposals based on NS and interlanguage data include the "pedagogic interactional grammar" by Edmondson and House (1981), comprising a large number of speech acts and discourse functions, and Rose's (1994b) recommendation for consciousness-raising activities on requesting. Bouton (1994a) suggests an instructional strategy for improving learners' comprehension of indirect questions, thus far a notable exception in that the proposed instruction is informed by a longitudinal study of learners' implicature comprehension. But with the exception of his study, the research-based recommendations for instruction in pragmatics have not been examined in action, that is, how they are implemented in classrooms and how effective they are for students' learning of the targeted pragmatic feature.

There is now a large and fast-growing literature on interlanguage pragmatics, that is, learners' use and acquisition of L2 pragmatic ability (Kasper & Blum-Kulka, 1993; Kasper & Rose, 1999; Rose, 2000;

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Bardovi-Harlig, this volume). Participants in these studies are often foreign language learners, who may have little access to target-language input and even less opportunity for productive L2 use outside the classroom. Second language learners participating in interlanguage pragmatics research often also receive formal instruction. And yet, most of the interlanguage pragmatics research informs about learners' pragmatic ability at a particular point in time without relating it systematically to their learning experience in language classrooms. To date, only one early full-length book publication has addressed the relationship between classroom language learning and pragmatic development in a second language (Wildner-Basset, 1986). In order to investigate how the learning of L2 pragmatics – both the learning processes and the outcomes – is shaped by instructional context and activities, three major questions require examination: what opportunities for developing L2 pragmatic ability are offered in language classrooms; whether pragmatic ability develops in a classroom setting without instruction in pragmatics; and what effects various approaches to instruction have on pragmatic development. The first and third questions clearly call for classroom research – the resources, processes, and limitations of classroom learning can be explored only through data-based studies in classroom settings. As a new kid on the block, classroom-based interlanguage pragmatics research can profit from the vast literature on educational research generally and second language classroom research specifically (e.g., Chaudron, 1988; Allwright & Bailey, 1991). A review of research on opportunities for pragmatic learning in L2 classrooms that do *not* offer any form for direct teaching in pragmatics reveals both limitations, especially of teacher-fronted teaching, and potentials for pragmatic development over time (Kasper, this volume). Data-based studies on classroom-based learning of L2 pragmatics are the focus of Part II of this book.

Answers to the second question – whether pragmatic ability develops without pedagogical intervention – can be gleaned from the pragmatics and interlanguage pragmatics literature. Adult learners get a considerable amount of L2 pragmatic knowledge for free. This is because some pragmatic knowledge is universal (e.g., Blum-Kulka, 1991; Ochs, 1996), and other aspects may be successfully transferred from the learners' L1. Current theory and research suggest a number of universal features in discourse and pragmatics. Conversational organization through turn taking and sequencing of contributions is a universal property of spoken interactive discourse, much as cultural and contextual implementations may vary. Basic orientations to the effectiveness and social cohesiveness of communicative action, such as the Cooperative Principle (Grice, 1975) and politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987), regulate communicative action and interaction

throughout communities, even though what counts as cooperative and polite and how these principles are implemented in context varies across cultures. Speakers and listeners have the ability to convey pragmatic intent indirectly and infer indirectly conveyed meaning by utilizing cues in the utterance, context information, and various knowledge sources (Gumperz, 1996). The main categories of communicative acts – in Searle's (1976) influential classification, representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations – are available in any community, as are (according to current evidence) such individual communicative acts as greetings, leave-takings, requests, offers, suggestions, invitations, refusals, apologies, complaints, or expressions of gratitude. Universal pragmatic knowledge includes the expectation that recurrent speech situations are managed by means of conversational routines (Coulmas, 1981a; Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1992) rather than by newly created utterances. It subsumes an implicit understanding that strategies of communicative actions vary according to context (Blum-Kulka, 1991), specifically, along with such factors as social power, social and psychological distance, and the degree of imposition involved in a communicative act, as established in politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Brown & Gilman, 1989). The major realization strategies identified for some communicative acts have been found stable across ethnolinguistically distant speech communities. For instance, the speech act set for apologies comprises as its major semantic formulas an explicit apology, an explanation, and an admission or denial of responsibility; minor, more context-dependent strategies include an offer of repair, a promise of forbearance, and an expression of concern for the hearer, all of which can be intensified or mitigated. These strategies have been found to be used in English, French, German, and Hebrew (Olshtain, 1989), Thai (Bergman & Kasper, 1993), and Japanese (Barnlund & Yoshioka, 1990; Maeshiba, Yoshinaga, Kasper, & Ross, 1996). For requests, the major strategies differ according to their level of directness – direct, conventionally indirect, and indirect – together with external and internal modification, and are available to NSs and ESL or EFL learners with such diverse native languages as Chinese (Johnston, Kasper, & Ross, 1998; Rose, 2000), Danish (Færch & Kasper, 1989; Trosborg, 1995), German (House & Kasper, 1987), Hebrew (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1986), Japanese (Hill, 1997), Malay (Piirainen-Marsh, 1995), and Spanish (Rintell & Mitchell, 1989) and to learners of such target languages as German (House & Kasper, 1987), Indonesian (Hassall, 1997), and Norwegian (Svanes, 1992). In their early learning stages, learners may not be able to use such strategies because they have not yet acquired the necessary linguistic means, but when their linguistic knowledge permits it, learners will use the main strategies for requesting without instruction.

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Learners may also get very specific pragmalinguistic knowledge for free if there is a corresponding form-function mapping between L1 and L2, and the forms can be used in corresponding L2 contexts with corresponding effects. For instance, the English modal past as in the modal verbs *could* or *would* has formal, functional, and distributional equivalents in other Germanic languages such as Danish and German – the Danish modal past *kunne/ville* and the German subjunctive *könntest* and *würdest*. And, sure enough, Danish and German learners of English transfer ability questions from L1 Danish (“*Kunne/ville du låne mig dine noter?*”) and L1 German (“*Könntest/würdest Du mir Deine Aufzeichnungen leihen?*”) to L2 English (“Could/would you lend me your notes?”) (House & Kasper, 1987; Færch & Kasper, 1989), and they do this without the benefit of instruction. Positive transfer can also facilitate learners’ task in acquiring sociopragmatic knowledge. When distributions of participants’ rights and obligations, their relative social power, and the demands on their resources are equivalent in their original and target community, learners may need to make only small adjustments in their social categorizations (Mir, 1995).

Unfortunately, learners do not always capitalize on the knowledge they already have. It is well known from educational psychology that students do not always transfer available knowledge and strategies to new tasks. This is also true for some aspects of learners’ universal or L1-based pragmatic knowledge. L2 learners often tend toward literal interpretation, taking utterances at face value (rather than inferring what is meant from what is said) and underusing context information (Carrell, 1979, 1981). Learners frequently underuse politeness marking in L2 even though they regularly mark their utterances for politeness in L1 (Kasper, 1981). Although highly context-sensitive in selecting pragmatic strategies in their own language, learners may underdifferentiate such context variables as social distance and social power in L2 (Tanaka, 1988; Fukushima, 1990). On the one hand, then, adult learners bring a rich pragmatic knowledge base to the task of acquiring the pragmatics of a second or foreign language – so rich that, in Bialystok’s (1993) view, their task (unlike that of L1-acquiring children) is predominantly one of achieving control of processing over already available pragmatic knowledge, for instance, selecting contextually appropriate linguistic forms to express pragmatic intent. Although we believe that this may be an underestimation of the complexity of L2 pragmatic learning – especially when positive pragmatic transfer is no option – Bialystok’s position underscores the significant role that existing pragmatic knowledge plays in L2 learning and suggests that language instruction purposefully build on it. On the other hand, learners do not always use what they know. There is thus a clear role for pedagogical intervention, not with the purpose of providing learners with new information but to make them aware of

what they know already and encourage them to use their universal or transferable L1 pragmatic knowledge in L2 contexts.

At the same time, ethnolinguistic variation is obviously abundant in pragmatics, confronting learners with new learning tasks. Specific context factors may be regularly attended to in some, but not all, communities. For instance, in comparable contexts, urgency was found to influence the request strategies of German but not of Japanese speakers (Morosawa, 1990). As predicted by politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Brown & Gilman, 1989), power relationships, social and psychological distance, and degree of imposition constrain communicative action universally, but actors' assessment of the weight and values of these universal context factors varies substantively from context to context as well as across speech communities (Blum-Kulka & House, 1989). For instance, in a series of studies, Beebe and Takahashi established that social status influenced the performance of face-threatening acts by NSs of Japanese and NSs of American English, but the impact of status on actors' choice of speech act strategies was stronger in the case of the Japanese than the American participants (e.g., Takahashi & Beebe, 1993). Furthermore, certain communicative acts are known in some communities but not in others. For example, in the category of declarations, acts tied to a particular institutional context derive their function from the institution and will not be available outside it. Thus, sustaining and overruling objections presupposes an adversarial legal system and rising to order a type of formal meeting arranged by parliamentary procedures. Performing communicative acts appropriately often involves norms specific to a particular cultural and institutional context, such as supporting a refusal of an adviser's suggestion with appropriate reasons and status-congruent mitigation in the course of an academic advising session (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1990). Pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic conventions are tied to the grammatical and lexical structures of particular languages. Thus, ability questions (e.g., "Can you return the videos?") do not seem to be conventionalized as request in Polish (Wierzbicka, 1985), while exclamatory questions (e.g., "What is this beauty!") are conventionalized as complimenting strategy in Egyptian Arabic but not in different varieties of English (see Miles, 1994, for review).

Although learners thus have to learn some new ethnolinguistically specific conventions when acquiring L2 pragmatics, much of the variability in the way that communicative acts are performed lies less in the absolute availability of a pragmatic strategy than in the degree to which a strategy is conventionalized in a speech community. For instance, Freed (1994) identified sixteen functions of questions in informal native English conversation, but for such illocutions as warning, disagreeing, refusing, or criticizing (Sakamoto & Naotsuka, 1982;

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Beebe & Takahashi, 1989a, 1989b; Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1990), information questions appear to be more highly conventionalized in Japanese or Indonesian than in English. Crosscultural differences in conventionalization can further be illustrated by pragmatic strategies such as rejecting (rather than accepting or qualifying) compliments (Wolfson, 1989a), complimenting as a request strategy (Holmes & Brown, 1987), complaining through an intermediary (Steinberg Du, 1995), prefacing corrections to a lower-status person by positive remarks (Takahashi & Beebe, 1993), offering a statement of philosophy in refusals (Beebe, Takahashi, & Uliss-Weltz, 1990), explicitly apologizing, explaining and offering repair in apologies (Olshtain & Cohen, 1983; Barnlund & Yoshioka, 1990; Bergman & Kasper, 1993), and selecting different directness levels in requesting (Blum-Kulka & House, 1989; House & Kasper, 1987). In addition to these crosscultural differences, the indexical meaning of speech acts and strategies varies inter- and intraculturally. Whether indirectness is perceived as more or less polite than directness, or whether volubility indexes more or less power, depends on cultural preferences and the context of use (Blum-Kulka, 1987; Tannen, 1993b). In the area of conversational management, active listening – signaling attention and alignment through response tokens – is an interactional practice in many communities, but the structural patterning, response tokens, and their epistemic and interpersonal meanings vary crossculturally (e.g., White, 1989; Ohta, this volume). As Bardovi-Harlig (this volume) demonstrates, many aspects of L2 pragmatics are not acquired without the benefit of instruction, or they are learned more slowly. There is thus a strong indication that instructional intervention may be facilitative to, or even necessary for, the acquisition of L2 pragmatic ability.

How can pragmatics be taught?

The apparent necessity – or, at least, usefulness – of instruction for pragmatic development brings us back to our third question: what are the effects of various approaches to instruction in pragmatics? Given the wide range of instructional contexts, there is not likely to be one approach which is to be preferred over all others in every context. Yet an intriguing issue to examine is whether despite such variation, potentially universal principles of instruction in pragmatics may be identified, in analogy with principles proposed for grammar teaching (e.g., Robinson, in press). At the same time, particular strategies of instructional intervention may prove differentially appropriate for different pragmatic learning targets, student characteristics, and institutional and

sociocultural contexts. It is a central goal of this book to take stock of what is known about the effectiveness of instruction in pragmatics to date and illustrate the wide range of research approaches that can usefully be adopted to investigate this issue. To that end, Kasper (this volume) reviews the classroom-based research on the teaching of pragmatics up to the present. Part II includes studies examining learning processes and outcomes of second and foreign language teaching when instructional environments have not been arranged to target particular features of L2 pragmatics. The studies presented in Part III investigate the effects of instruction in a variety of specific pragmatic features and skills, aiming at different target languages and student populations and employing different instructional approaches.

It has often been noted that the content and forms of language teaching are significantly influenced by the content and forms of language testing. Especially in instructional contexts where formal testing is regularly performed, curricular innovations that comprise pragmatics as a learning objective will be ineffective as long as pragmatic ability is not included as a regular and important component of language tests. The models of communicative language ability we referred to initially (Canale & Swain, 1980; Canale, 1983; Bachman, 1990; Bachman & Palmer, 1996) were expressly designed to provide constructs for language instruction *and* assessment, yet tests of pragmatic ability are few and far between. One exception is the Canadian Development of Bilingual Proficiency project (e.g., Harley, Allen, Cummins, & Swain, 1990a), in which tests for grammatical, discourse, and “sociolinguistic” competence in L2 French were developed. Sociolinguistic ability, defined as “the ability to produce and recognize socially appropriate language in context” (Harley, Allen, Cummins, & Swain, 1990b, p. 14), was operationalized as requests, offers, and complaints produced in oral role-plays, the selection of contextually appropriate realizations of speech acts in a multiple-choice format, and written directives in a formal letter and informal notes. But until recently, comprehensive approaches to the assessment of pragmatic abilities in a variety of second languages have been lacking. Two roads have been taken to remedy this problem. One is to examine the sociolinguistic, pragmatic, and discourse properties of existing tests, such as oral proficiency interviews, in order to evaluate how capable these tests are of assessing pragmatic ability. The other approach is to develop principles, instruments, and procedures specifically for pragmatic assessment. The final part of this book illustrates both options for the testing of pragmatic ability.

PART I: THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL BACKGROUND

The chapters in Part I provide the theoretical and empirical background to the data-based studies which follow. In Chapter 2, Kathleen Bardovi-Harlig discusses how native speakers (NSs) and nonnative speakers (NNSs) differ in their use of pragmatic knowledge in production and comprehension. The production section of her chapter is organized around the four-way distinction utilized in Bardovi-Harlig (1996), namely, culture-specific speech act use, use of semantic formulas, use of linguistic devices, and utterance content. After providing ample evidence from the research literature that NNSs' understanding and use of the pragmatics of the target language often differ considerably from those of NSs, she discusses how these differences have been explained, including input factors, learner expectations, teaching materials, level of proficiency, and washback. The chapter concludes with a summary of evidence of the need for instruction, but Bardovi-Harlig is careful to note that although the evidence indicates divergence of interlanguage pragmatics from target-language pragmatic practices, such differences per se do not constitute a mandate to teach (or facilitate the acquisition of) target-language pragmatics – many other factors need to be considered in determining what, if any, areas need to be targeted for instruction, or how instruction is to be implemented.

Gabriele Kasper begins in Chapter 3 by noting that although pragmatics has played a considerable role in approaches to first and second language classroom research, classroom research has played only a minor role in interlanguage pragmatics thus far. She then reviews the small body of research on pragmatic learning in the second or foreign language classroom, considering both observational studies, which focus on classroom processes and the opportunities they afford for pragmatic learning in authentic instructional contexts (that is, contexts that have not been specifically arranged for research purposes), and interventional studies, which examine learning outcomes subsequent to some form of (often quasi-experimental) treatment. One recurrent outcome of the observational studies is the limited opportunities that teacher-fronted instruction offers for the acquisition of target-language pragmatics. The interventional studies converge on demonstrating that,