DEVELOPING PRAGMATIC ABILITY:
A CASE STUDY

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INTRODUCTION

The case study of a single adult learner reported on in this paper began as an effort to focus exclusively on the development of pragmatic ability, that is, the ability to deal with "meaning as communicated by a speaker (or writer) and interpreted by a listener (or reader)" (Yule, 1996: 3-4). The intended narrow focus of the study was meant to distinguish it from, say, that by Schmidt's learning of Portuguese in and out of the classroom. It was also intended to help gather information on pragmatic development over time, an under-investigated area in second language acquisition research (cf. Kasper & Schmid, 1996; Cohen, 1996b).

In the field of foreign language teaching and learning, there is a growing concern to include a systematic focus on form within even the most communicative, socially-contextualized methods (cf. Leeman, Artegañol, Pridman, & Doughty 1995). At the same time, there has been and continues to be empirical evidence that a mastery-oriented emphasis on identifying and correcting learner error may not be as effective as teachers would like it to be (see, for example, Chaudron, 1988; Cohen & Robin, 1976; and most recently, Roberts, 1995). As in many areas of endeavor, the word is "moderated." While there may be an increased interest in a systematic focus on structure in language teaching, there is an admonition of sorts in a recent paper by Tarone (in press):

...there is mounting evidence that an adequate theory of SLA should model a second-language learner not solely as a decontextualized information-processor, but rather combine the work of researchers like Labov, Schumann, Giles, Alhurighit, Lantolf, and Swain to view the learner in social context as an evaluating, converging or diverging interacter, whose cognitive capacities are significantly impacted by social interaction.

Having just gone through a four-month experience of sometimes identifying with the "decontextualized information-processor," in my case hard at work developing an interlanguage grammar in Japanese, I felt it would be beneficial to describe that experience for the sake of other learners, teachers, curriculum planners, and administrators. The focus of this paper, then, is on a foreign and not a second-language learning situation, in which the context for learning was almost exclusively that of a classroom in an academic setting. In addition, over half of the instructional focus was on the learning of structure, and to a large extent...
At the time I started my study of Japanese for this study I would classify myself as a false beginner because I had audited parts of a beginning Japanese course at the University of Minnesota (1994–95), during which time I had some private tutoring sessions as well. I was learning to read hiragana and katakana, but had done no writing. Prior to these studies, I had spent about two months in Japan on three separate trips, the longest for a month, when I taught a summer course on second language acquisition in Tokyo.

Course structure, the teacher, and the students

The first-year Japanese course that I took (Japanese 105) was referred to in the time schedule as “accelerated,” as it covered two semesters in one at the University of Hawaii during Fall, 1996. It ran for four months, one hour and forty-five minutes each morning or 140 hours in total, plus lab time (12 tapes covering model conversations, listening tasks, and conversational drills for each lesson).

The social setting for this study in foreign-language learning was almost exclusively the academic setting of a classroom, and the instructional approach, while eclectic in nature, favored the following:

1. rote mastery of structure (a “spiral structure approach”),
2. the use of native language for cuing language tasks,
3. the use of translation between Japanese and English for some of the oral exchanges and for the completion of literacy tasks, and
4. a concern for correcting non-native-like forms whenever possible.

One quarter of class time (35 hours) was devoted to instruction in speaking, given all the other instructional needs. This setting provided somewhat limited exposure to the form of communicative language that promotes rapid development of pragmatic ability. Tasks were for the most part cued in the students’ native language (English). Students were asked to translate reading texts into English and to prepare responses in English. Spoken utterances were translated as well (depending on the task).

The textbooks were from the series developed by the Tsukuba Language Group in Tokyo (Bojinsha Co.): Situational/Functional Japanese, Volume One (Lessons 1 through 12 were included in the accelerated first-year course). The books were supplemented by departmental handouts on vocabulary, functional expressions, structure-focused tasks, and reading and writing exercises. For the most part, the teacher followed the textbooks closely, covering all of the grammatical structures, most of the vocabulary, and doing many of the drills. The tests were constructed by the unit as a whole. This meant that on any given day, the teachers of a given level of Japanese would all be teaching the same portion of the same unit more or less.

The instructor was free, however, to design her own materials and pair work in order for students to apply the structures, vocabulary, and phrases in context. She also had the students view a videotaped model conversation along with each lesson, and showed several culturally-oriented videotapes of life in Japan.

The teacher of the course was a senior teacher in the department with years of teaching experience. The accelerated nature of the course put her under considerable pressure to teach hiragana, katakana, and 140 kanji, as well as a large vocabulary list and numerous grammar rules all in four months. She was committed to teaching all these aspects of the course, and requested that we get as much exposure as possible to the spoken language through the language lab tapes and through contact with Japanese speakers outside of class. She was impressively energetic, diligent, thorough, and always of good cheer. The very next day after homework assignments were handed in, she would return them with feedback. When students were engaged in paired drills from the textbook and in the activities that she had designed and distributed.
in advance of the class sessions, she would circulate around the room to catch and correct as many non-native-like utterances as she could at the moment in which they were produced. She was responsive to feedback from students as well.

The course began with seven registered students and myself as a sit-in-auditor, who was generously afforded by the teacher an opportunity to participate fully in the class. The students were all expected to have had some exposure to Japanese before the course, ideally including some familiarity with the writing system. Consequently, we were required to take a Japanese placement test before being placed in the intensive course, and had to have demonstrated some basic familiarity with the Japanese language. Toward the end of the four-month semester, there were five students, three undergraduates who had taken the equivalent of this course before, a fourth who had made numerous trips to Japan, and a graduate student who had lived in Japan for a few years. None of them were of Japanese background ethnically.

Data collection procedures

The means of data collection included a tape-recorded journaling of insights as they occurred, plus a series of written notes, also recorded as the insights occurred. I made 25 audio-taped journal entries in all—one or two per week. I had intended to collect journal data more often, but since I was already spending almost two hours per day in class plus up to eight hours on homework before the next class, I found myself an unwilling subject when it came to a more extensive collection of data regarding questions and determined what my responses to them were at that point in time.

Another rich source of data was the continual flow of quizzes and tests that I took and on which I received immediate and thorough feedback regarding my non-native-like forms. I recorded all of these corrections both in vocabulary, in structure, and in spelling and in kanji strokes. I reviewed these items repeatedly as a means of eradicating them, perhaps determined to show that careful impact on learning, contrary to what research evidence has tended to show (cf., for example, Truscott, 1996).

RESULTS

It is likely that many of the experiences I will recount here are not unique to my learning experience with Japanese. Undoubtedly other learners have encountered some of the same kinds of experiences, in part because the challenges that I faced are shared by English-speaking learners as a group. Second, it was because others have learned languages in accelerated courses in an academic setting. Third, it is because others have taken a course looking for a focus on communication and have found that concerns for grammatical structure and literacy have been given somewhat more emphasis.

There is no intention to be critical of the instructional method, nor of my own teacher’s instructional practices. The focus is intended to be exclusively on my experience as a learner in the given accelerated program of instruction in this academic setting. Undoubtedly, this experience is largely an individual one. What I intend to contribute through the report that follows is a linking of personal language learning experience with theoretical principles regarding language learning. Ideally, the recounting of these experiences will be useful to curriculum planners, teachers, and other learners.

I received grades in the A range for most of my work and a grade of over 90 (A) on the two-hour final exam that was given to all students completing a year of Japanese. My overall performance in the course ranked me first in the class of six students, but it needs to be remembered that this was the only course that I was taking, unlike the other students in the class who were taking either two or even three other classes simultaneously. In addition, I was using a host of language learning and language use strategies in a systematic way and other learners were doing less of this. The instructional program did not provide guidance on how to learn Japanese; the emphasis was on the teaching of it.

Let us now consider the four research questions related to the development of pragmatic ability.

Learner’s perceptions about the development of his ability to use pragmatics rules

As a way of summing up the perceptions I had of my development of pragmatic ability over the accelerated course, I provide here my own personal responses to the self-assessment questions presented as research questions and based on the Hudson et al. (1995) scales.

Recognizing the sociocultural strategies needed in order to perform a given speech act

Over the semester, I developed some ability to perform speech acts, such as requesting, thanking, and apologizing. At times, however, the sociocultural patterns from the other languages that I speak interfere with my performance in Japanese.

For example, during paired drills in Lesson 2, the teacher was playing the role of a friend who found out that I was going to the post office and asked whether she could come along. The appropriate response would have been simply, “Ee ‘yes’.” Instead, I said er followed by ja ‘well’, indicating that I was somewhat unwilling to have her go with me. When I said Ee ja, the class laughed because of the inflection both in meaning and in level of formality, so the teacher said her line again. Once again, as if on automatic, I repeated Ee ja and again everyone laughed, this time a bit more. I actually had several non-native-like features in the same utterance. I was seemingly informal and a bit reluctant to have her accompany me. The vernacular expression for “OK, let’s go” would most likely be Un, ja ito, an expression that I did not know. In this drill, the textbook did not include an alternative form apart from er ‘yes,’ as the signal for her to come along, such as itamasho (Ee, itamasho ‘OK, let’s go’). Then the ja was interference from several of my stronger foreign languages, where Spanish ye ‘now, already’ and Arabic/Hebrew a’sta ‘let’s go’ would be the next appropriate thing to say to indicate that we should get going.

The interference was so strong that I did it a second time after public correction. It just came out automatically. It was not clear to me at that moment what I needed to say, and I certainly did not think that a simple ‘yes’ was enough.

Another example involved an apology in a task where I was to supply a written version of what I would say in the given situation:

You have received a letter in Japanese.

Interrrupt your friend, and explain that because this has a lot of kanji, you don’t understand. Apologetically request that he or she read it to you.

My reaction to this was that I did not have enough Japanese to do this properly. All I could think of for this situation was sumimassen was all that was expected. Thus, in this instance the Japa-
nese speech act strategy actually paralleled that used in various other foreign languages that I speak. So in this case, I was avoiding transfer of the response strategy from another language out of fear that I would probably be committing negative transfer if I did. My problem here was twofold: first, I never really sorted out the difference in register between the language used in written tasks and oral tasks. Most of the tasks for homework were written memos to people rather than spoken requests. In cases where a written task was meant to stimulate an oral one, the use of the written mode ruled out the use of facile expression mitigators, intonation mitigators (i.e., the way I said sumeseten), and silence/space mitigators.

Using the appropriate sociolinguistic expression

In completing the many worksheets assigned as homework (often involving the writing of memos to specified recipients), at times I had the uneasy feeling that the expressions which I was selecting were not appropriate. When I spoke in class, if I simply mimicked the phrases appearing in the text, I could get by in a paired task, but rarely felt that I had full control over choice of the appropriate phrase. For example, if I greeted my drill partner with ogendki arakia (literally, 'how is your health?' but meaning 'how are you?'), I was not sure whether it was an acceptable utterance. My mind would question whether it was accurate enough in terms of content (i.e., whether it can be used on a daily basis or only if I haven't seen the person for some time) and level of formality (ogendki vs. genki) to be appropriate for use with a peer in an academic setting as opposed to using a "safer" greeting relating to time of day, such as ohayoo ('good morning') or ohayoo gozaimasu, if I chose to be more formal.

Because I was operating from my rule base of Japanese usage rather than from any automatized or vernacular source, I did much better when I had plenty of time to sit and think about what to write than when I had to say the utterance rapidly under pressure in class. The notebook that I filled with handy grammar rules provided me relatively quick access at home to the rules so that I could, for instance, furnish the appropriate verb forms to go with clauses using connectors such as -node 'because,' and -tara 'when, if after.'

With regard to the sequence for introducing myself or someone else to others of the same status, lower status, or higher status (Lesson 1), I knew cognitively that these differences existed between Japanese and English. I did not foresee that the socially crucial speech act situation of making introductions would confuse and even intimidate me somewhat, especially when I was called upon to introduce a friend to a higher-status professor and to do it in a way that did not exact the fellow student nor downgrade the professor. The following is a portion of my tape-recorded journal on the matter of introductions:

In many cases, they seem to be the same after baimenshe 'how do you do?' - doozo yoroshiku 'nice to meet you' and kohen to mooshimara 'I'm Cohen.' But I guess there is a point at which the more elevated person says doomo 'hello,' thanking A for introducing B to him. So it is a bit complex. (9/4/86)

During the course, I found myself likely to be too formal with the equal status person and perhaps a bit too informal with the senior one. After the course was completed, I found that I had some of the vocabulary for introductions but that since it was some four months since the material has started, I had forgotten which forms to use with whom. It had become a hodgepodge in my mind.

Using the appropriate amount of speech and information

I wanted to use more speech than Japanese do. It was not just the amount of speech but also the level of specificity. I wanted to be more specific, and reveal more about myself, my emotions, my desires, where it would appear that in Japanese culture more is left to be inferred or intuitively. The Japanese language, however, had one built-in check against my being too verbose in conversation. I needed to think out my entire utterance in advance because I was translating everything from English, I had to change the word and phrase order considerably. If I tried using an 'online' approach to speaking Japanese (as I do with my other languages), rather than thinking out my utterance in advance, I would find that I frequently came to a place where I wanted to use an adverbial phrase or a clause (e.g., a clause using -node or -tara 'because') but then it was too late to insert it. I soon learned why Japanese listeners would be unlikely to cut me off when I spoke, and would in fact give me extra time to finish my utterance — because they would often need to hear the end of the utterance to understand what I intended to say, especially since the verbs are placed at the end in most clauses.

Using the appropriate levels of formality (e.g., through word choice phrasing, honorifics, and choice of verb forms)

We were introduced to irregular honorific (kaigo) forms of the verb in Lesson 9 and regular ones in Lesson 10 (i.e., in the last month of the course). In the case of the irregular forms, there were totally different verbs for the same concepts e.g., taberu 'eat' became tokukashieru and miru 'look at' became gomaru ni aru. Once we learned these honorific forms, I expected that we would start to use them regularly in addressing the teacher. On several occasions we performed drills where we had to use the honorific form in asking her a series of questions. However, aside from those drills, we were not asked to do so. Although I achieved some control over the irregular and regular honorific verb forms, I must admit that I did not learn to use these forms when speaking about a higher status person to an equal or lower status person, even when that higher status person was not present. I suppose that I was resisting this rule, since it seemed illogical to me. It also underscores the point that what is taught is not necessarily learned — that input is not necessarily converted automatically by the learner into intake. There may well be a screening out of some of the material, as in this case.

In this process of learning verb forms, I needed to learn the plain form, so I developed fairly reasonable control over the structure in isolation. However, I still did not have any real sense of when and how to use it other than some limited control of its required use in certain subordinate clauses such as with -to 'it, when, whenever' and -node 'because' clauses. Adding to my confusion was an interaction with the teacher which I recorded as follows in my journal:

The professor pointed out that ohayoo 'good morning' was appropriate when talking down to a person of lower status. I asked him [my drill partner] where he was going and I said, Dokko e ikimasuka? And then again it seemed simple [informal] to me but the teacher pointed out that the -masu part in dokko e ikimasuka makes it more formal; no would be more informal.

It was at this point that I became even more confused because I had thought that the plain form of the verb would stand alone, and now saw that it was, in fact, modified through the use of some tag, whether no, -nda, -yo, or some other structure.

As the middle of the course, I noticed that the Drills book had examples which contrasted the use of the formal and the plain forms of the verb. Here is a journal entry regarding contrasts of this type, where the use of the formal -masu verb form makimasho 'do you understand' was contrasted with the plain form, watashi:
a clear contrast in the textbook between more formal and less formal speech — asking a very close acquaintance as opposed to a friend for their phone number. Also, there’s a contrast between formal and informal thanks. So one is pitched against the other. So whether I will remember to do this remains to be seen.

(10/24/96)

In truth, I did not remember to make this specific contrast subsequently, perhaps in part due to the fact that I did not create opportunities for myself to use the plain form in contexts where it would be appropriate to do so.

Aside from some familiarity with levels of formality in the verb system, I also acquired some notion of terms to describe my own, as opposed to someone else’s, family. However, much of what I was taught was not really learned and consequently has not been accessible. Given all the other material that I needed to learn, I found it burdensome to have to learn two forms of the same word — one to use when describing myself or my own family and another one in asking about someone else’s family.

Using the appropriate degree of directness (e.g., through verb forms or strategy choice)

I acquired some sense of how to address people without being too direct. By not using a pronoun but rather their name plus the polite suffix — san, this already reminded me not to be direct, but my language skills at being indirect were limited. I kept avoiding doing so. I wanted to use anata ‘you’ a number of times, even though I was informed by the teacher and by the textbook that it was inappropriate in many contexts to use the direct pronominal form in Japanese. So, instead of saying anata and in place of what seemed to be the overly indirect form, Yamadasan, I ended up not saying anything, which must have seemed a bit peculiar to the teacher. This was a case of my avoiding negative transfer with the cost being that my already slow speech got slower and the gaps in my speaking became more pronounced.

Using the appropriate degree of politeness through politeness markers (e.g., ‘thank you,’ ‘please,’ ‘if you don’t mind’) as well as through appropriate levels of formality and directness

I learned a few politeness markers and mitigators but finished the course unsure when to use one or the other. For example, whereas there are two forms of ‘please,’ onegai shimasu and kudasai, I was not able to arrive at a working distinction between them, partly because at times there is no distinction. Several times when I used kudasai in class or on worksheets, however, I was corrected and informed that I needed to use onegai shimasu instead. I never pursued this point to determine what rule governed the differential use. The teacher later informed me that onegai shimasu would be more appropriate if the addressee were of higher status.

The role of explicit information about pragmatic facts in my language learning — the extent to which the teacher, the textbook, other students, natives in the environment, or others provided this information

The teacher provided numerous pragmatic facts, as did the textbook. From time to time, I also elicited from her other facts or fine-tuning regarding the ones we had been given. For example, once asked in class about the extent to which Japanese speakers actually use all of the foreign words that we were being drilled on through katakana, since there exist amongst speakers of other languages (such as Hebrew) a desire to resist using the foreign loanword if at all possible. The teacher’s response was that the Japanese do, in fact, use these loanwords a good deal. I also received several pieces of corrective feedback from one of the students who had already taken a first-year course at a community college and been in a sales position where she had used Japanese with customers. For example, I referred to “my family” as watashi no kazoku and my fellow student corrected me that since kazoku was only used by the speaker in referring to his or her family, it was redundant to say watashi no kazoku, that just kazoku was enough.

The extent to which the social context contributes to pragmatic success

My encounters with other Japanese speakers out of class remained rare during those four months and after the course as well. I found that I did not feel comfortable initiating a conversation with the host of Japanese tourists that I come in contact with everyday — in the buses, on the streets, in shops and restaurants, and so forth. What worked was when women tourists from Kyoto who were waiting for a bus to the University at the same stop as I was, noticed me studying Japanese, and started talking with me. We had a 20-minute conversation, en route to campus. I even escorted them to a campus cafeteria for their lunch. But that only happened once.

Even after the four-month accelerated course, I had a residual feeling of insecurity about what I did not know (given all my non-native-like utterances), about my slowness of speech (and need to perform constant mental translation), and about my inability to understand what they say back. Also, my pronunciation was apparently accurate enough in Japanese so that it worked to my detriment in that those Japanese speakers that I did interact with might think that I knew more than I did. Furthermore, I felt insecure about my knowledge of the social rules on how to begin a conversation, what to talk about, and how to talk about it. I learned the phrase to say when I saw a Japanese tourist struggling with a map, not sure where to go (De shimasu ka? — What happened?). The problem was that the tourists all seemed so much at ease with the maps and explanation booklets (printed in Japanese and readily available) that they certainly did not need my assistance.

Furthermore, whereas I felt unsure as to how to “break in” with Japanese tourists, this has not been the case when I overhear someone speaking French, Spanish, Portuguese, or Hebrew. I feel more at ease with those cultures and with the kinds of remarks that may be looked upon by the members of those cultures as appropriate to say to strangers. While English is seen as a language of international communication, as are Spanish and French as well, observers of Japanese society have suggested that the Japanese are not used to having outsiders use it and may not welcome its use or mastery by non-natives (Lew, 1996; Stronach, 1995: 73-74). This perception of Japanese culture, however accurate, has contributed to limiting my “out-of-class encounters” considerably.

Since my social context was restricted primarily to the language classroom, it was the teacher who created it for me. She had her hands full with our intensive course. She was speeding through a curriculum that was prescribed by the department, and she needed to move through it in one semester rather than two. For each lesson we saw an accompanying videotaped segment on the dialogue from that lesson. Several times we saw other videotapes in Japanese, English, or both, with the focus on cultural content. But for the most part, the social context was that of a language lesson with the teacher in charge, running down a list of language teaching activities, and orchestrating what we said, when, to whom, and why. Since my exposure to naturalistic data (through native speakers, TV shows, and so forth) was limited, I did not perceive that I had any “feels” for what sounded good in the language to fall back on when I wanted to check if my pragmatic choices were correct. I was largely limited to the phrases that I had either memorized from the textbook or handouts in advance or read out from the Drills book.
The relationship between the learner's motivation, learning style, and learning strategy preferences and the acquisition of pragmatic ability

I was clearly motivated to learn Japanese and to learn the appropriate pragmatic structures. I did all the homework assigned, so these included the tasks which provided pragmatic information. The instructional program had built-in limits with regard to my pragmatic development in that it was offered in an academic setting where Japanese was taught as a foreign language, removed from direct contact with native speakers and their culture. One of the areas in which I fell short was in not getting the maximum out of the audiocassettes that accompanied each of the twelve lessons. My sense was that while the speakers on the tapes delivered their lines authentically, the pace was sometimes too rapid for my untrained ear. For most tasks, I had to listen repeatedly to the same utterances and then check what was written in the Drills textbooks as well. Consequently, the tasks would lapse more into exercises in reading comprehension than in listening comprehension, as intended, so that unfortunately I began to rely more on my eyes than on my ears. The effect was that the exercises did not work to benefit my listening comprehension and the reading of the structures, especially if I had to recite them aloud, did not fix them in my memory.

When the teacher would give presentations about Japanese structure, discuss course logistics, or provide instructions about current or future tasks, these interventions were partly or totally in English. Thus, somewhat to my surprise, I found myself not making an effort to understand the Japanese that she might use in these situations because I knew that she would most likely repeat what she said a second time in English. Consequently, I was behaving in a way similar to the native English speakers in the concurrent bilingual education classrooms in Redwood City, California (Cohen, 1975) who used to (and perhaps still do) wait for the teacher’s message to come along again in their dominant language rather than making the effort to understand it in their weaker language. There was a week or so in which the teacher used primarily Japanese in class, in response to a discussion that the two of us had. In reality, I was not listening in a way that would enable me to follow much of what she said, so her return to alternating between Japanese and English improved my sense of security in class, although it provided me less exposure to teacher talk, which would at times include the vernacular (e.g., if the teacher was recounting an anecdote).

With regard to learning styles, I was willing to be flexible in my learning style choices in order to conform with the method. Hence, I embraced an analytical style to cope with the numerous grammatical structures that I encountered. I also used a host of language learning and use strategies. Among the vocabulary learning strategies, I used the mnemonic keyword technique repeatedly — i.e., linking a native-language word or phrase. I would not have survived without using the mnemonic keyword device. For example, in order to learn jidoohako ‘vending machine,’ I thought of using jido to get my money back from the vending machine, and if that did not work then using my hand by means of a key. This keyword phrase worked both in helping me identify the meaning of jidoohako when I encountered it orally or in writing, and also in production when I had to say or write it. As another example, I learned shukudai ‘homework’ by means of a Hebrew mnemonic keyword phrase using shuk ‘market’ and dai ‘enough.’ I thought of being assigned enough (= so much homework that I did not have time to go to the shuk).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

It can be seen that the social context in which I, as an older adult language learner, found myself in, namely, an academic setting, was conducive to the successful learning of grammatical structures, some grammar rules, literacy skills, vocabulary, and the ability to engage in basic conversation. According to the standards set by the Japanese instructional unit, I succeeded in learning the material in their course. In effect, I had become socialized into the culture ofrote mastery learning well enough to succeed at it (cf. Lim, 1996, for an empirical study on this form of instruction).

I did not attain adequate pragmatic control to be able to investigate at a more finely-tuned level the degree of control that I had over a number of, for example, speech acts such as requesting, apologizing, and even complaining, as I have been able to do with other languages, such as Hebrew. All the same, I took on the study of Japanese expressly because I knew from time spent in Japan and from the literature that speakers of Japanese might vary greatly both socioculturally and sociolinguistically from English or Hebrew speakers in their pragmatic behavior. For example, it may be that a Japanese speaker would avoid performing the speech act of complaining in a given sociocultural situation (e.g., discontentment with a given policy at a public bath house), but even if they did perform the same speech act as Westerners would (e.g., acknowledging their hosts at the end of a home-cooked meal), they might use sociolinguistic forms that are different from those used by English or Hebrew speakers (e.g., seemingly apologizing to their hosts at the end of a meal) (Cohen, 1996b). In any case, I did not develop enough communicative ability in the language to be able to test out pragmatic behavior in any significant way out of class, and in class speech behavior was mostly lock step in nature.

As with any qualitative study, there is a need to mention a series of limitations. First and foremost, this was the experience of a single adult learner, going through an intensive as opposed to a regular course, and experiencing the instructional approach of only one teacher from the instructional staff. In addition, the language was a highly difficult one for an English speaker to learn, and one that was distinct from any others that the learner had encountered.

With regard to other limitations, although the unit had a series of standard operating principles, there were undoubtedly differences in interpretation of these principles, depending on the individual teacher. Hence, my experience in this one accelerated course offering by the Japanese teaching unit may not be similar to that of learners in other classes in the same teaching unit or even to other learners in the same class. It also needs to be stressed that the course was not intended as a single, terminal Japanese learning experience, but rather as the first in at least a two-year sequence. They were also expected to be aiming at fulfilling the two-year obligatory language requirement by starting with this course and then continuing on afterwards. Hence, the next two semesters of Japanese would be intended to help solidify the vocabulary and structures that they were exposed to in the accelerated first-year course. Unfortunately, I was not able to continue studying in the program in order to determine the extent to which subsequent instruction provided that type of reinforcement, as opposed to being more of the same type of instruction as described above.

In closing, the field of second language acquisition can benefit from more learner descriptions of their classroom and concurrent out-of-class experiences, such as that by Schmidt and Frota (1986), and those with a more narrow focus, such as the study reported here. It would be beneficial if more learners were to do case studies of themselves as learners in different social situations in the classroom since this is a social context — however rarified — and one that many foreign language learners find themselves in most of the time while in high school and even in college (except in the case of study abroad programs; see Freed, 1995). There are probably numerous learners like myself, who although having the possibility of contact with unlimited numbers of native speakers of the language that they are learning, rarely venture out of the classroom in order to use the language that they are learning and provide themselves with only limited exposure to the vernacular for the duration of the course or courses.
NOTES


2i.e., not in a country where the language is the official or dominant language of the society.

3A number of the diffi's were modified by the Department so that they would be more comprehensive and more intelligible as well.

4Kanji are Chinese characters, hiragana is a phonetic syllabary used for Japanese words for which kanji cannot be easily provided (e.g., conjugating ends of verbs and adjectives, grammatical particles, and auxiliary verbs), and katakana is another phonetic syllabary used for transcribing foreign loanwords (other than Chinese).

5I took the grammar portion in a version of the placement test that used the Latin alphabet or romanji. I opted out of the second portion which involved reading comprehension because although I had some grammatical background in Japanese, I was not literate at the beginning of the course.

6Perhaps in areas where there are numerous Japanese tourists, it would be beneficial to include in the first-year instructional materials a unit (perhaps optional) with suggestions on how American learners of Japanese might start and conduct conversations with Japanese tourists in a way that is cross-culturally acceptable to the tourists. For example, students could conduct a mini-survey where each is given an official name tag, a survey-team title, and a clip-board and sent out to collect data from tourists (Personal Communication, Dina Yoshimi, February 19, 1997).

REFERENCES


3 In Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 18, 149-169.


