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Teaching and Learning Second Language Pragmatics

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Statement of Purpose/Focus

The purpose of this chapter is to give readers a sense as to the breadth of topics being investigated in L2 pragmatics research these days. The field is burgeoning as this chapter is being written, as research papers on L2 pragmatics are being given more frequently at a panoply of meetings. This chapter intends to describe a number of the studies so that readers can get a sense of what has been done recently in the field and what remains to be done. Researchers may find just the niche for themselves through reviewing what has been done. Teachers will hopefully get ideas as to what needs to be taught in the L2 classroom with regard to pragmatics, an often neglected area in L2 language studies—to the detriment of language users who wish to avoid the embarrassment of pragmatic failure due to a lack of knowledge as to how to be pragmatically appropriate.

Defining Terms

L2 pragmatics is seen as a subfield within general pragmatics, which in turn is seen as a subfield within sociolinguistics. The concern of pragmatics is with meaning as communicated by speakers (or writers) and interpreted by listeners (or readers), with a focus on intended meanings, assumptions, and actions performed when speaking (e.g., making a request) (based on Yule, 1996, pp. 3–4). Whether the reception or production in a given L2 is pragmatically successful depends on various factors, such as (1) the language users’ proficiency in that L2 and possibly in other (especially related) languages; (2) their age, gender, occupation, social status, and experience in the relevant L2-speaking communities; and (3) their previous experiences with native (and near native) speakers of the L2 and their multilingual/multicultural experiences in general (for more on definitions of pragmatics, see Cohen, 2014a).

The ultimate goal of the chapter is to glean insights from research studies as to how learners can be more pragmatically appropriate in a host of L2 performance situations, whether in the perception and production of speech acts or in other areas. Speech acts are often, but not always, the patterned, routinized language that natives and pragmatically competent non-native speakers and writers in a given speech community (with its dialect variations) use to perform functions such as thanking, complimenting, requesting, refusing, apologizing, and complaining (see Olshtain & Cohen, 1983, pp. 19–21; Cohen, 1996, pp. 384–385). Speech acts are a challenging area of pragmatic behavior because
of the possible misfit between what one does or does not say or write in a language in the given speech act and what is meant by it. Speech act theory, in fact, provides a reliable and valid basis for examining pragmatic patterns that are primarily focused on selected utterances from the discourse (Mey, 1993). Beyond speech acts, there are numerous other areas of pragmatic focus. Thus, this coverage of L2 pragmatics issues will start by looking first at the notion of research altogether, then at politeness, and then at speech acts, the favorite focus of pragmatics research. Then, we will look at other areas of pragmatics: conversational overlap, backchanneling, humor, sarcasm, the pragmatic function of discourse markers, deixis, and conversational implicature. We will end by considering the teaching of L2 pragmatics and the learning and performing of pragmatics.

**Important Developments/Trends/Traditions in L2 Pragmatics**

The author of this chapter has studied 12 languages beyond the native language (English) over the course of a lifetime, and this has included two Asian languages, Japanese and Mandarin. While achieving relative pragmatic control in, say, four of these languages (Hebrew and three Romance languages), there is still a sense that even with these languages, pragmatic failure may occur (see Cohen, 1997, 2001). In fact, it is more the pragmatic failures than the pragmatic successes that have made for acute awareness that pragmatic performance benefits from explicit instruction—that learners do not just acquire pragmatic niceties through osmosis. A major source of this pragmatic failure has been inadequate knowledge as to how to perform speech acts. It is no accident that much of the L2 pragmatics research literature focuses on speech acts. It is the inability of non-natives to perform speech acts appropriately which has captured so much of researchers’ attention. Such a focus has provoked at least two reactions from critics. The first is that it is myopic to look just at isolated speech acts rather than viewing them as part of a larger discourse, where in fact a series of different speech acts may interact (see Cohen & Ishihara, 2014). Second, there is the view that much of pragmatics deals with other issues. Consequently, this chapter makes an effort to be comprehensive in its coverage of topics that have been studied in L2 pragmatics.

The perspective taken in this chapter is that while L2 pragmatics is a fascinating area in its own right and worthy of extensive and robust study, it is equally valuable to fashion means to make this knowledge accessible to L2 learners so that they can learn to be more pragmatically appropriate. So, the chapter is meant to be speaking both to researchers and teachers, as well as to learners.

**Themes in the Research Literature**

**Research Methods**

**Study Abroad**

Study abroad (SA) is a popular context these days for conducting L2 pragmatics research. A creative study with the aim of describing pragmatic development of students while in SA focused on service encounters recorded in situ between L2 learners of Spanish and local Spanish service providers in Toledo, Spain (Shively, 2011). The participants in the study were seven U.S. students who studied abroad for one semester. What made the research design innovative was that the data consisted of naturalistic audio recordings that participants made of themselves while visiting local shops, banks, and other establishments. The study was longitudinal with recordings made at the beginning, middle, and end of the semester by each student, for a total of 113 recordings. Additional data included students’ weekly journals and interviews with participants. The analysis focused on openings and requests and examined the ways in which students’ pragmatic choices shifted over time, considering
the role of language socialization and explicit instruction in pragmatics in that development. Overall, the changes in openings and requests suggested that the students learned and adopted some of the pragmatic norms of service encounters in the Toledo speech community.

**Describing Variation in Interlanguage Pragmatics**

Whereas in the Toledo study the innovation was in the way the data were collected, another line of research still in need of actualization would be to get at true variation in intercultural pragmatics. While *cross-cultural pragmatics* compares the pragmatics of one culture or subculture with that of another, *intercultural pragmatics* (at least as the author defines it) looks at cultures in contact and the hybrid forms of pragmatics that result from this interaction. So if we were to conduct genuinely intercultural pragmatics research, it would be important to include in the sample subjects who are likely to have elements of hybrid pragmatics in their data.

A hypothetical study was proposed in Cohen (2012a), focusing on doctor-patient interactions in the US Southwest in which intercultural pragmatics would be involved. The paper identified and discussed research design issues, types of data employed, the measures used, and concerns about data analysis. The proposed study was intended to highlight the number of variables that can lead to pragmatic variation in the research outcomes. When doctors use Spanish as a non-native language, the question is how their pragmatics is perceived by their Spanish-speaking Mexican immigrant patients and with what impact. The proposed study suggested comparing the pragmatics of this context with that of native Spanish-speaking doctors interacting with these same patients, English-speaking doctors interacting with mainstream patients in English in the US Southwest, and doctors in Mexico interacting with their patients. The purpose of such research is to problematize just what intercultural pragmatics entails when it involves speech communities in flux, taking into account individual variation.

So, for example, when an Asian learner speaks English, whose pragmatics is being used? Is it English with a pragmatics overlay from the first-language (L1) language and culture? Even if there is an effort to reflect English-language pragmatics, which English-speaking country’s pragmatics are being adhered to, and if the speakers do not include any native English speakers, does it really matter if the pragmatics reflect approaches used by native speakers? In other words, in these cases would violation of native-speaker norms constitute pragmatic failure? More will be said about this topic below under “Teaching English as a *Lingua Franca*.”

**Rater Variation in the Assessment of Speech Acts**

This study addressed variability among native-speaker raters who evaluated pragmatic performance of English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) learners (Taguchi, 2011). Low- and high-imposition requests and opinions were produced by 48 EFL learners through a computerized oral discourse completion test (DCT). Four native English speakers of mixed cultural backgrounds (one African American, one Asian American, and two Australians) assessed the appropriateness of the speech acts. To explore norms and the reasoning behind the raters’ assessment practice, introspective verbal reports were collected and revealed similarities and differences in the use of pragmatic norms and social rules in evaluating appropriateness. Some raters were more focused on linguistic forms such as the directness level of expressions or the use of politeness markers, while others based their scoring decision on non-linguistic aspects such as the use of positive/negative politeness strategies and semantic moves as well as the content of speech. Still other raters incorporated additional, unique features that they felt were salient into the evaluation criteria (e.g., whether or not a student provided a useful suggestion when criticizing his/her friend). Even when focused on the same dimension, the raters differed
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in their degree of acceptance. For instance, all raters considered excessive verbosity as problematic in a small request, but they had different criteria for determining how much was too much.

The main finding was that English L1 raters do not form a unitary category. They can vary widely in their perceptions and interpretations of appropriateness, politeness, and formality in pragmatic performance if they come from subcultures that have very different community norms for social interaction and communicative events, as in Taguchi’s (2011) study. It is also possible that the raters in that study subconsciously tailored their comments to meet the perceived expectations of the researcher and did not produce a report that reflected their response to the original performance.

Politeness and Impoliteness

A pervasive concern addressed in the pragmatics literature is that of politeness and impoliteness. Here let us sample just a few of the recent studies—first looking at cross-cultural variation in the perception of impoliteness and at ethnic variation in perceptions of politeness within a country, and then at teasing, jocular insults, and swearwords.

Cross-Cultural Variation in the Perception of Impoliteness

An investigation of cross-cultural variation in the perception of impoliteness was conducted based on 500 instances of impoliteness as reported by students in England, China, Finland, Germany, and Turkey (Gulpeper, Martí, Mei, Nevala, & Schauer, 2010). The analytical framework looked at rapport management, covering various types of face and social equity. An analysis of differences between the geographically separated data sets revealed that the England-based data had a preponderance of impoliteness events in which quality face was violated, whereas the China-based data had a preponderance of instances where equity rights were violated—where group values were prized more highly than individualistic ones.

Generally, research (Hickey, 2005) places Spanish-speaking cultures in the group of rapprochement cultures, which relate politeness to positively assessing the addressee and creating bonds of friendship and cooperation, and English-speaking cultures in the group of distancing cultures, which primarily use politeness to generate respect and social differentiation. A study compared the understandings and use of politeness by native speakers of Spanish from Spain and non-native speakers of Spanish from the US (Garcia & Terkourafi, 2014). The respondents’ behavior as reported in written questionnaires was related to these norms. The results confirmed these predictions and further showed that the more advanced learners were able to align themselves better with Spanish norms but still had some problems with the turn-taking system.

Another politeness study first compared the complaints of 10 local native-Malay speakers and 10 expatriate native-English speakers in Brunei in terms of move structure and levels of directness, combined with the frequency of modality markers (Ho, Henry, & Alkaff, 2012). In addition, it attempted to address the relationship between polite behavior and its effectiveness in eliciting the appropriate response from the hearer. Data from an oral DCT revealed similarities and differences in the complaint move structure between Malay and English speakers. Both groups were rated as using fairly indirect language in two key moves of the complaint, but they used different strategies to mitigate the social effects of their complaints and requests for action. The results confirmed the commonly held belief that politeness does vary between cultures. Furthermore, responses from an acceptability judgment questionnaire indicated that being indirect, and therefore polite, may not be effective in eliciting the appropriate response to a request for action in a complaint speech act. Both groups, for example, considered direct requests to be more effective in getting a response in a situation with a car...
mechanic than that of indirect requests, although they also thought that an aggressive direct request might not be as effective.

**Cross-Cultural Differences in Handling Rudeness**

A study of impoliteness investigated the communicative practices in English and German online discussion fora as exemplified by two thematically related sample threads (Kleinke & Bös, 2015). Linguistic rudeness was investigated from a first-order perspective, considering laypersons' perceptions of token structures realized in specific contexts as rude, and a second-order perspective, focusing on strategies outlined in theoretical models of politeness. The paper considered the question of how participants used intergroup rudeness as a means of in- and out-group construction and examined how intergroup rudeness was metapragmatically negotiated as the discussions unfolded. The English thread, drawn from the BBC's message board *Have Your Say* (HYS), contained 880 postings, and the German one, from *Spiegel Online* (SPON), consisted of 754 postings. To ensure comparability, the two threads dealt with the same topic: the Pope's 2008 visit to the US. In the English forum, the topic question was “Should the US give the Pope such a presidential welcome?” In the German forum, participants were asked “*Der Papst in den USA—Rettet in der Not!*” (“The Pope in the US—the savior?”). The German forum was clearly more interactive and showed a preference for rudeness and (a quite substantial amount of) meta-discourse on the interpersonal level. In contrast, postings in the English forum tended to retreat to group levels, avoiding personal attacks and metapragmatic comments. The results showed that intergroup rudeness as well as metapragmatic comments were handled differently in the two communities explored.

**Politeness and Impoliteness in Ethnic Varieties**

Building on earlier research describing pragmatic features of New Zealand English (NZE) and identifying ways in which politeness was expressed in NZ workplace talk, Holmes, Marra, and Vine (2012) extended the sociopragmatic analysis of NZE in several ways. Using the theoretical model that the researchers had developed to analyze workplace interaction, they focused on intercultural interactions between Māori and Pākehā (i.e., Kiwis of European descent) and utilized data from both Māori and Pākehā workplaces to shed light on distinctive features of politeness in NZE workplace discourse. For example, they examined the value of egalitarianism in NZ society and explored its pervasive influence on the ways in which politeness was achieved in different NZ communities of practice, exemplifying some distinctively NZ ways in which formality and informality were indexed in workplace interaction. The analysis illustrated how these influences were manifest in small talk, humor, meeting protocols, and in the extension of the distinctive pragmatic particle *eh* to new domains. The study suggested how Māori ways of doing things were subtly influencing Pākehā norms and thus contributing to the development of a distinctively New Zealand set of values and pragmatic norms.

**Teasing**

Teasing is a humorous speech genre in which a co-present participant is the target of joking—a behavior that while intended as playful could be viewed pragmatically as being somewhat impolite behavior. Research on teasing in everyday conversation has revealed a range of functions, including socialization, identity negotiation, conflict resolution, bonding, and amusement. A recent study looked at six undergraduate students from the University of Minnesota who chose to spend a semester studying in Toledo, Spain (Shively, 2015). The participants were 20/21-year-old native-speaking
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college sophomores or juniors, majoring or minoring in Spanish. A total of 24 recordings (12 hours) of conversations with their Spanish host families were collected. The results of the study revealed that in everyday conversations during SA, three of the subjects were teased fairly frequently by their Spanish host families, while the other three were teased infrequently. The topics of teasing included eating habits, study skills, drinking and partying too much, impractical footwear, romantic interests, and physical attributes. However, one particular topic appeared consistently: teases in which the topic was learners’ non-target-like L2 use, L2 misunderstanding, or L2 abilities. The researcher argued that teasing can potentially facilitate L2 learning by drawing learners’ attention to language use and form, which in turn helps reveal the social norms and practices of the host family and of the host culture in general.

Jocular Insults

A research project on leadership discourse and gender in Hong Kong workplaces looked at jocular insults occurring at a business meeting in a small factory outlet involving three male and three female staff members (Ladegaard, 2012). The two female leaders used jocular insults and other forms of verbal abuse repeatedly, in what was interpreted as instrumental rudeness on the part of the two leaders. These discursive strategies were seen as having the purpose of attacking their interlocutors’ face and thereby enhancing the leaders’ power. The researcher pointed out that whereas jocular insults may function not only as a means by which superiors maintain their position in the workplace but also as a socially acceptable strategy by which the subordinates can challenge their leaders, in the present context these strategies were used predominantly by the two leaders. The researcher argued that a careful consideration of the sociopragmatic norms of the micro- and the macro-context may explain why the subordinates would accept these insults.

In this particular context, the power distance and hierarchical relationships would explain why these leaders’ demeaning discourses were not directly challenged. The researcher pointed out that normatively masculine and feminine management styles may be culturally specific. Apparently it is considered legitimate for Chinese leaders to adopt a paternalistic autocratic management style, and employees are expected to be deferential and obedient. In a culture that places great emphasis on power distance and filial piety, there is little to protect employees from exploitation. Bearing in mind that this study reported data from just one meeting in one workplace in Hong Kong, the study nonetheless lent support to more recent accounts in sociolinguistics arguing that women are not intrinsically more polite or considerate than men.

Swearwords

Knowing how to perform in a pragmatically appropriate way includes knowing when and how to swear. Unfortunately, language teachers are often reluctant to teach learners how to swear, especially when teaching Asian students, whose sensibilities may be easily offended by such instruction. A study in NZ, for example, found that knowing how to use the f-word was crucial in bonding with fellow workers and with the boss on the soap factory floor in New Zealand. Over 2,000 interactions were collected in English (mostly English L1) (Daly, Holmes, Newton, & Stubbe, 2004). Non-natives apparently can find themselves ostracized for not cursing like their peers. On the comprehension side, the learner may hear these invectives and be put off or even shocked, and certainly not eager to learn when and how to use them.

Another study published at the same time investigated the perception of the emotional force of swearwords and taboo words (S-T words) among 1,039 multilinguals (Dewaele, 2004). The study was based on data drawn from a large database collected through a web questionnaire on bilingualism
and emotions. As to the findings, t-tests revealed that the perceived emotional force of S-T words was highest in the L1 and gradually lower in languages learned subsequently. Self-reported L1 attriters were found to judge S-T words in their L1 to be less powerful than for those who were still dominant in their L1. Participants who learned their language(s) in a naturalistic or partly naturalistic/context gave higher ratings on emotional force of S-T words in that language than did instructed language learners.

**Research on the Nature of Speech Acts**

**Compliments in English**

A recent study offered a multimodal analysis of turns in everyday English interactions that are used for making compliments (Keisanen & Karkkainen, 2014). Based on 8 hours of video-recorded casual face-to-face conversations in English among mostly native speakers of American English from a corpus at the University of Oulu and a video recording called "Farmhouse," the researchers argued that gaze direction had a specific role in the production of both compliments and their responses. It was found that compliment producers sought mutual gaze in order to pursue a response, while recipients typically avoided mutual gaze by turning their head and gaze down towards their lap or some object at hand in order to display resistance towards self-praise.

**Apologies in Japanese**

Another study, just of L1 pragmatics, was undertaken to investigate the functions of apology expressions in Japanese, given that their meanings are situated and negotiated during the interaction (Sandu, 2013). Data were collected from Japanese television dramas, where the ongoing development of the relationships that protagonists were involved in was chronologically observed. The researcher found that shifts from *gomen* 'sorry' and *warui* 'bad' to *sumimasen* 'sorry' occurred mostly in confrontational discourses, where the protagonists engaged in some sort of arguments or in tense situations where conflict seemed imminent. Three realization patterns of these shifts surfaced from the data: avoiding conflict and displaying discontentment, staging and negotiating selves, and attitudinal distance. Nevertheless, these patterns were not mutually exclusive; overlapping between the former two and the latter two was encountered in most of the examples, self-presentations remaining the constant. Shifts from the use of *gomen* and *warui* to the use of *gomen nasai* 'excuse me, I'm sorry' occurred when the speakers attempted to distance themselves from the interlocutors (attitudinal distance) or when the speakers offered a heartfelt apology. Shifts from *sumimasen* to *gomen nasai* commonly occurred when the status of the relationship that the characters were involved in was undetermined, still undergoing negotiations, as a way of adjusting the attitudinal distance. So, *gomen nasai* was found to function as an attitudinal distance-gauging device and for expressing a heartfelt apology.

**Requests in Vietnamese and Finnish**

Another study of L1 pragmatics employed open role-plays in six scenarios with differing social power and perceived imposition levels to elicit requests from nine Vietnamese native speakers (Nguyen & Ho, 2013). Data were analyzed for level of directness, choice of request strategy, and use of modification. The findings suggested that unlike requests in some European languages reported in the literature, requests in L1 Vietnamese were realized predominantly by means of imperatives in equal power situations and the use of query preparatory strategies (e.g., the speaker checks the hearer's
ability/willingness to perform the act or asks for permission to perform the act, with the utterance often taking the form of a question) in low-to-high power situations, regardless of imposition levels. Requests were modified preferably by means of supportive moves such as steerers (i.e., phrases used to prepare the hearer for the request, such as by checking if the hearer was available to perform the request) and grounders (i.e., excuses, reasons, or explanations that speakers used to justify their request and thus to appear reasonable), and through lexical means such as the use of address terms, honorifics, modal particles, and appealers (i.e., particles or phrases the speaker used to call for the hearer’s understanding and sympathy).

Another request study used elicited request speech act data in Finnish to view variability of personal perspective in the use of formal or informal “you” forms across a variety of situations (Peterson, 2010). The data for the study were elicited through scripted, face-to-face oral DCT interviews with 68 speakers of Finnish who all lived in the greater Helsinki area. The speakers exhibited a great deal of congruency when they were scripted as addressing someone familiar, being in a position of equal or higher status than the interlocutor, and when the request was considered a low imposition. In such situations, speakers tended to use a second-person perspective, with informal “you” forms. For example, the combination of a low rate of imposition and familiarity resulted in the use of straightforward use of a second-person perspective and the informal “you” form in nearly all of the requests, such as a request to an assistant to take phone messages (“You work at a telecommunications company. You ask your assistant to take your phone messages while you are in a business meeting. Your assistant has worked in your department for five years. You say:”) and a request to a close relation for some salt (“You are cooking dinner at home, and your [close relation] is in the kitchen. You need salt, and your hands are oily. You say:”).

On the other hand, a situation that was highly face-threatening, such as asking special permission from a relatively new supervisor to leave early for a lunch break (“You are a secretary, and you have worked at the company for three weeks. Today you want to meet a friend for lunch, so you ask your supervisor if you can leave early. You say:”), resulted in no requests made in a second-person perspective. Rather, speakers opted for a request that preserved the addressee’s negative face, either a first-person or third-person perspective. Scenarios where the addressee was a stranger, combined with a high rate of imposition, such as in asking to use that person’s mobile phone (“You are on your way downtown on the bus, and your mobile phone’s battery is dead. You need to phone your friend to decide where you will meet for coffee. The person sitting next to you, who is about your same age, has a mobile phone. You say:”) elicited the most variation in terms of perspective.

Cross-Cultural Speech Act Research

Research on speech acts often uses the paradigm of comparing L1 performance across languages. It is a pleasure to see how robustly research on speech acts has developed in the last 40 years—especially with regard to English-as-a-second-language (ESL) and English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) studies. Back in the late 1970s, little empirical data were available on how natives and non-natives performed pragmatics. Now there is a sizeable quantity of such data. Clearly, native speakers of certain languages have gotten greater focus, such as Spanish, Japanese, Chinese, and Korean speakers of English, but work has also been done in collecting ESL/EFL data from speakers of other languages, such as Persian, Arabic, and German. And every day there are new studies looking at pragmatics in languages other than English.

One area of development is an increase in the study of certain speech acts, with a focus on speech acts that had not been studied at all or only on a limited basis, such as the speech act of giving condolences or that of criticizing someone (i.e., beyond academic or literary criticism, as encouraged by teachers). Another is to look at written speech acts, such as in email messages. The following are two such studies.
Complaints

One recent study looked at complaints across cultures (Chen, Chen, & Chang, 2011). In this study, a total of 20 Americans in the US and 20 Taiwanese university students were recruited and asked to respond to a DCT containing eight complaint-provoking scenarios: the waiter spilling a drink on a patron’s new shirt, discontent with the late shift at work, background noise while on the phone, someone cutting in line at a theater, a hole found in a new T-shirt, the tutee not paying attention, the chairperson forgetting an appointment with a member of staff, and a mother opening her child’s mail. The DCT was used in the study because it clearly elicited the complaints under study and allowed for cross-cultural comparisons. Five complaint strategies (opting out, interrogation, accusation, request for repair, and threat) were identified and analyzed in terms of their overall and combined use across the eight scenarios. The quantitative results indicated that the American and the Chinese participants shared similar distributions in both overall and combined strategy use across the complaint situations. The qualitative findings, however, showed differences in choice of linguistic forms and expression of semantic content. The study revealed that compared to American complaints, the Chinese complaints seemed to be more sensitive to social power.

Requests

Another cross-cultural speech act study examined 200 email requests written in English by Greek Cypriot university students at a major, English-medium university in Cyprus over a period of several semesters (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011). The emails were sent to two English L1 faculty who had lived in Cyprus for more than 15 years and to nine EFL faculty who had lived in the UK or US for more than 10 years. The study examined forms of address (salutations), the degree of directness employed, and the degree and type of supportive moves and lexical/phrasal modifiers used by students in order to soften or aggravate their e-requests. The faculty members’ communication style with their students could be characterized as friendly but formal (e.g., they did not encourage first-name use with students and had contact with students only during class and office hours). Six archetype responses drawn from the email data were evaluated by 24 British lecturers from 12 universities in the UK. The study found that the non-native-speaking (NNS) students’ emails were characterized by significant directness (particularly in relation to requests for information), an absence of lexical/phrasal downgraders, an omission of greetings and closings, and inappropriate or unacceptable forms of address. Consistent with previous email studies, the results revealed that the NNS students resorted largely to direct strategies (“please” + the imperative), rather than more appropriate conventional indirectness, both in the case of requests for action and for information. The researcher argued that such emails could be perceived as impolite and discourteous and therefore capable of causing pragmatic failure, primarily because such messages appeared to give the faculty no choice as to whether to comply with the request and failed to acknowledge the imposition involved.

A study comparing ESL vs. EFL refusals investigated the effect of participating in an SA program on the pragmatic development of Chinese students’ employment of internal modifiers in their L2 English refusals (Ren, 2013). Twenty Chinese students studying abroad in the UK and 20 Chinese students remaining at home participated in the study, and their L2 refusals were examined over the course of one academic year. Data were collected three times by an eight-situation Multimedia Elicitation Task—a computer-based multimedia DCT in which participants were asked to sit at a computer, watch a series of slides, listen to instructions and to specifically recorded initiating utterances, and respond orally. The results revealed that the two groups showed similar development with regard to the range of internal modification types in their refusals. Analyses of the participants’ use of individual internal modifications revealed different developmental patterns in the utilization of address terms.
and downtoners. The SA students employed more downtoners than their at-home (AH) counterparts in their refusals. The findings also revealed that only the SA students showed fine-tuning. The SA students rarely employed an address term in their refusals. When they did, they knew they could address the high-status interlocutors by their first names according to the L2 culture. In contrast, the AH students employed a title to address the high-status interlocutors much more frequently.

Apologies

There are some excellent examples of cross-cultural studies that rigorously triangulate to ensure that the findings are more robust in nature. An example is a study of 35 Greek native speakers and 35 learners of Greek in Greece for study abroad from England (Bella, 2014). The study involved DCTs, questionnaires about the perceived power relationships and distance in vignettes, and verbal report to verify the rationale for the responses. The study revealed major differences in performance in Greek in four situations, with the non-natives diverging in significant ways from the natives. For example, in a situation about apologizing for missing an appointment with their professor, the vast majority of Greek native speakers avoided telling the truth—that they had forgotten about it. Instead, they opted for explanations that mainly involved family and health problems, which are generally considered legitimate and acceptable excuses for transgressions in Greek society. Their verbal reports revealed that telling the truth could be perceived by the professor as an insult, since it would be interpreted as a sign of indifference and disrespect. Moreover, it would damage their own image as responsible and reliable students. In contrast, the learners of Greek opted for telling the truth about missing the appointment.

A study of Canarian Spanish speakers demonstrated that there is variation in speech act performance not just by culture but also by dialect (González-Cruz, 2012). This study provided insights into the most frequent apology strategies used by a group of 100 university students at a university in the Canary Islands, Spain, when apologizing in eight different situations. A DCT was constructed, which took into account the degree of familiarity between the participants, the severity of the offense, the age of the offended person, and gender. Canarian respondents used direct apologies with the typical apologetic formula Lo siento 'I'm sorry' as the strategy that seemed to be most frequently used. The strategy of expressing an apology obtained the highest percentage of use (42%), followed at great distance by the other strategies—giving an explanation (17%), offer of repair (13%), minimizing the offense (7%), acknowledging responsibility (4%), denying responsibility (3%), and promise of non-recurrence (8%). The study also considered humor as an apology strategy (used 15% of the time). The male respondents opted for humor as a strategy more often than women, who seemed to prefer giving explanations. Also, women tended to promise non-recurrence and to minimize the offense more often than men.

Thanking

Another cross-cultural speech act study had as its aim to ascertain the attitudes that British and American English native speakers had towards the speech act of thanking in Spanish (de Pablos-Ortega, 2010). A corpus of 64 coursebooks, which included 250 situations representing the speech act of thanking orally, was used to construct a questionnaire to determine the attitudes of 300 participants, divided equally among Spanish, British, and American respondents. The British and US respondents were enrolled in Spanish 1.2 or FL courses, and the Spaniards were enrolled either in Spanish or English degree programs in Spain. The questionnaire included 12 scenarios in which the thanking formula was omitted. Participants were prompted to answer questions based on their perceptions and to include other responses whenever they considered them to be appropriate. The main finding was that both British and American speakers signaled the absence of thanks in the Spanish
culture as an indicator that the Spaniards were being rude and inconsiderate. Spanish speakers, on the other hand, accepted the high probability of situations in which no thanks took place in Spain as an integral part of the way of interacting in the Spanish culture. Thanking in the British culture was seen as a necessary speech act in certain contexts and, if absent, the British would consider it a sign of rudeness, showing a lack of consideration, thus producing a negative attitude. The US students did not view the absence of thanks as negatively as the British students did.

**Compliments Across Dialects**

As an example of a cross-dialectal study of speech acts, a study was conducted which examined similarities and differences in the realization of compliments (about a person's skills) in Cameroonian and Canadian French (Farenkia, 2012). The data were collected by means of DCTs administered to 55 participants in Yaoundé (Cameroon) and 39 respondents in Montréal (Canada). The Cameroonian participants showed a preference for double-head acts (i.e., two separate compliments, like “Your presentation was super. I really found it interesting.”), while the Canadians more frequently employed single-head acts. It was also found that indirect realizations of head acts occurred only in the Cameroonian data (e.g., complimenting a meal by saying “I’ll come back some day for a cooking lesson.”).

**Expressing Emotions**

As an example of a cross-cultural study investigating a lesser-investigated speech act area, research was conducted to examine how English L1 users expressed emotions in Mandarin and how this differed from the way that Mandarin L1 users expressed emotions (Jian, 2015). Scenarios were adopted to elicit joy, anger, sadness, fear, and neutrality. Both groups articulated anger, joy, and fear with a high pitch. Both groups also employed high intensity for anger and joy and low intensity for sadness and fear. Learners generally employed larger fundamental frequency ranges than native speakers, particularly for anger and fear. Learners of Mandarin articulated level tones with lengthened duration and contour tones with shortened duration, affecting the correctness of the portrayal of emotions. Learners used a similar intensity range for all emotions, whereas native speakers tended to vary the intensity with different emotions.

**Conversational Overlap**

One area of real concern for Asian speakers of American English beyond speech acts is how to break into an ongoing conversation, especially given the preferred politeness patterns in their native languages and cultures. Typically, the non-native misjudges whether a given pause means it is okay to break in, especially since native speakers of different languages may have different ways of pausing and may also have different attitudes about someone cutting into the conversation during someone else's turn. For example, research comparing conversational strategies in French and Australian English found that French speakers not only tolerate, but indeed expect, a variety of incursions into a current speaker's turn, unlike speakers of Australian English, and that these incursions are generally treated as collaborative strategies (Beal, 2010). Apparently conversational overlap in French is considered a feature of involvement and liveliness, lending a sense of joint purpose to verbal exchanges. By contrast, it is regarded as aggressive and unacceptable by members of Anglo-Saxon speech communities like English native speakers (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 2005).

Against this research backdrop, a study was conducted focusing on overlapping talk as a feature of conversational management in multi-participant talk in advanced L2 French, in relation to L1 French and English (Guillot, 2014). The data collected consisted of multi-participant simulated television
discussions on the topic of anti-smoking campaigns. They represented the communicative behavior of two main groups of subjects: advanced learners of French (four groups, two of pre-year-abroad subjects, two of post-year-abroad subjects) and native speakers of French (two groups) (25 subjects in all, four to eight per group). All groups were recorded twice, first in their L2, then in their L1: the 12 recordings thus encompassed L1 and L2 French, and L1 and L2 English. The findings confirmed the active propensity of French speakers to use overlapping talk as an interactional resource more than Australian English speakers. The frequency of use of overlaps in the L2 French post-year-abroad data, closer to L1 French than to L1 English, suggested that the greater interactional and strategic value of this type of overlap in L1 French may have been recognized and built on.

**Backchanneling**

Another area of concern in terms of conversational management is how listeners use backchanneling to signal that they are following a conversation. A recent study focused on backchannel feedback and its effect on intercultural communication in dyadic conversations in English between 30 Japanese EFL students based in the Nagasaki prefecture and three American exchange students (Cutrone, 2014). The findings of this study demonstrated several differences in how members of each culture used backchannels in terms of frequency, variability, placement, and function. This study also found evidence supporting the hypothesis that backchannel conventions that are not shared between cultures contribute to mutual negative perceptions. The results of this study showed that, when compared to the American college students, the Japanese EFL students sent backchannels far more frequently overall, which most notably included a greater percentage of simultaneous speech backchannels and minimal responses. The Americans spoke a great deal more, posed a far greater number of questions, and produced a greater percentage of extended responses.

This study demonstrated a tendency among the Japanese participants to produce unconventional backchannels in situations when they did not understand what their interlocutor was saying. The interpretation for this behavior was that Japanese EFL speakers may sometimes feign understanding and/or agreement in order to keep conversations pleasant. This belief was further strengthened by several of the Japanese EFL participants’ admission in the playback interviews that they had often used a continuer, a sign of understanding, agreement, and/or support, and empathy as backchannels in situations where they did not understand (71%) and/or when they disagreed (100%) with what their interlocutor was saying.

**Humor and the Uses of Laughter**

Getting humor in an L2 is a daunting task. Producing it appropriately is even more daunting. Attempts at it may end up with non-natives being laughed at more than being laughed with. One study of failed humor had as its goal to conduct a rigorous examination of just what is entailed in L2 learners' attempts to understand humor (Bell & Attardo, 2010). Six advanced non-native speakers (three Japanese, two Korean, and one Chinese graduate student of English) were involved in a degree in an MA TESOL program, kept diaries in which they recorded their experiences with humor in English over an eight-week period. Group meetings were held every two weeks to allow the participants to elaborate on, interpret, and discuss their experiences. All instances of failed humor were extracted, coded, and used to construct a typology, which identified seven ways in which a speaker may fail to successfully engage in a humorous exchange:

1. failure to process language at the illocutionary level,
2. failure to understand the meaning of words (including connotations),
3. failure to understand the pragmatic force of utterances (including irony),
4. failure to recognize the humorous frame,
5. experiencing a false negative: missing the joke,
6. experiencing a false positive: seeing a joke where none was intended, and
7. failure to understand the incongruity of the joke.

A follow-up study by one of the same researchers focused on native English speakers' handling of humor, as if to accentuate just how problematic responses to attempted humor can be, even for native speakers (Bell, 2013). The researcher looked at native-speaker responses to a joke that hinged on a rather subtle pun ("how's" = "house"). The pun situation involved the mail carrier inquiring about a homeowner's dog that had attacked him in the past but wasn't outside the last few days. When the mail carrier asks, "How's your dog?" the homeowner, hearing (or pretending to hear?) "House your dog," responds "I did." The joke was impossible for most hearers to comprehend without an explanation. A total of 278 L1-hearer responses were elicited by 22 undergraduates enrolled in a sociolinguistics course at a large, public university in the western US. The most common reactions included non-verbal responses, explicit expressions of non-comprehension (e.g., "I don't get it"), laughter, silence, and repetition of the punch line. Significant differences were found when analyzing the responses by gender and social relationship, but not age. The joke was met with laughter 28% of the time. The numerous hearers who did not understand it tended to respond with uncomfortable or nervous laughter.

Focusing just on laughter, a study was conducted looking at the ways in which laughter—specifically, what was termed coping laughter—was utilized to manage the face-threatening relational aspects of disagreements rather than to deal with the actual content of disputes (Warner-Garcia, 2014). The four specific functions of coping laughter that were analyzed were (1) mitigation of face-threat, (2) concealment of face-loss, (3) serious-to-non-serious frame switch, and (4) facilitation of topic transition. The functions were seen to be dependent on who initiated the laughter, how other participants responded to the laughter, and the overarching context and participant roles at play in the interaction. The researcher argued that coping laughter was an effective strategy for dealing with the interactional friction caused by a disagreement without dealing with its content.

**Sarcasm**

Equally as daunting for L2 learners as perceiving humor is perceiving sarcasm. According to Kim (2014), successful understanding of sarcasm in L2 can be a substantial challenge for learners for at least two reasons: (1) the inherent incongruity of meaning that is frequently exhibited in instances of sarcasm and (2) the highly context-dependent nature of sarcasm. Native speakers of a language possess top-down knowledge (e.g., intuitions and experiences) through which they can (in many cases) successfully interpret their interlocutors' sarcastic intent, while non-native learners have to use a bottom-up approach. As an example of recent research on this topic, a study examined how Korean adult EFL learners interpreted sarcasm in spoken English (Kim, 2014). Twenty-eight Korean adult employees of a trading company in Korea participated in the study. Participants were asked to identify instances of sarcasm in video clips taken from the US TV sitcom *Friends*, and then to assess the possible intent of the speaker and the communicative goals associated with these sarcastic utterances. During individual interviews, participants reported the cues that they attended to while processing sarcasm. Analysis revealed that learners drew upon certain features of L1 schema during the L2 comprehension process.

According to the researcher, there were various explanations for why Korean participants did not perceive the use of sarcasm in *Friends*, such as lack of knowledge about how sarcasm is generally used in the specific L2 context, lack of linguistic data about highly conventionalized sarcastic utterances,
and lack of knowledge about the types of cues used to convey sarcasm (Kim, 2014). For example, the majority of native-speaker participants saw the use of “Yeah, right” in Friends not only as an example of a conventionalized sarcastic remark but also as a way of disagreeing with or making fun of the interlocutor. For those 60% of the Korean participants who did perceive it as sarcasm, they all misperceived the intent as being that of simply trying to be funny. Many Korean participants also apparently lacked knowledge about how to interpret speakers' facial expressions, especially the use of a “blank face,” which is one of the cues that sarcasm users in the US typically adopt.

The Pragmatic Function of Discourse Markers

Frequently used discourse markers, such as “I think,” “well,” “yes/yeah,” “you know,” and “please,” can play an important role in signaling pragmatic functions, both in speaking and in writing. The following are brief descriptions of two recent studies that highlight the issue.

The Frequency of Use of Discourse Markers

One study of college EFL learners in China looked at the frequency of use of discourse markers by 141 English majors from three Chinese universities (Wei, 2011). The data consisted of responses to interview questions such as “How might your life look ten years from now?”, descriptions of their home and of recent activities, and an apology to a friend for having missed a dinner engagement. While intermediate and advanced students used similar discourse markers and in the same order of magnitude, quantitative and qualitative analyses indicated that advanced students tended to better employ discourse markers than intermediate students in managing spoken interactions coherently and in performing social functions to cater to contextual needs.

The Cross-Cultural Misuse of Discourse Markers

Another study investigated the effect of native language (Mandarin) on the use of English discourse markers by L1 Chinese speakers of English (Liu, 2013). Ten graduate students originally from mainland China and five American English native speakers at the University of Florida served as subjects. All students were interviewed for 15 minutes in English by native English speakers. Topics for the interviews included hobbies, weekend activities, sports, favorite teachers, favorite movies and TV programs, and their happiest experiences. The Chinese students were interviewed on the same topics in Chinese. Results showed that three Chinese discourse markers were found to influence their corresponding English expressions. The finding that the L1 Chinese speakers used the deliberative function of “I think” in medial or final position, while the native English speakers did not, would suggest that they transferred this use of “I think” from their L1 (wǒ juéde). Second, the L1 Chinese speakers used “yeah/yes” as a backchannel after the interlocutor’s reaction “uh-huh” or “okay,” while the native English speakers did not. This use was also interpreted as negative transfer from the corresponding Chinese expression dui because it has this function in Chinese. Finally, Chinese L1 speakers used “ah” to perform a clause-medial function (followed by self-correction) in the same way that a would be used in Chinese, while the native English speakers did not use “ah” in this way.

Deixis

Another concern of pragmatics researchers is that of deixis, namely, the use of words and phrases that cannot be fully understood without additional contextual information. Words are deictic if their semantic meaning is fixed but their denotational meaning varies depending on time and/or
place (e.g., words like “there,” “this,” and “that”). This would also apply to the use of personal pronouns. When bilinguals do not use pragmatically normative forms in one of their languages, it is often assumed that they do so because of insufficient exposure. A study showed, however, that bilinguals who are familiar with pragmatic norms for the use of personal pronouns may choose to reject them and, by extension, the sociocultural worlds that they index (Koven, 2009). The study involved interviews and ethnographic observations of 22 bilingual women in their late teens to early twenties, who were the daughters of Portuguese migrants to France. His findings were that they used second-person address forms with their parents in their two languages in ways that diverged from French and Portuguese monolingual usage. By examining participants’ metapragmatic discourse about French and Portuguese pragmatic paradigms of address and their different implications for relationship and identity, the researcher argued that these bilinguals chose forms of address that at times marked a rejection of the sociocultural norms. His conclusion was that their language use was partially mediated by their ideologically informed attitudes towards the socially indexical forms in and across each language.

**Conversational Implicature**

A further concern of pragmatics researchers is for *conversational implicature*, namely, the implied meaning as interpreted by listeners based on the context of an utterance and their knowledge of how conversation works. Non-natives need to decode linguistic and contextual clues and then use them to make inferences about speakers’ implied intentions. As a sample of recent L2 research on implicature, Taguchi (2013) reported the results of two studies, in the first of which participants were 160 Japanese learners of English in a branch of an American university in Japan. The respondents’ ability to comprehend implicature was measured with a computerized listening test consisting of 40 multiple-choice items: 16 conventional implicature items (i.e., where the interpretation was encoded in linguistic forms—e.g., “she has two daughters”), 16 non-conventional implicature items (i.e., where the meaning was derived from context—e.g., “A: Has Tim left for school yet? B: It’s after 9”), and eight literal-meaning items. The conventional implicature included two indirect speech acts: requests and refusals. Ability to comprehend conventional implicature was found to precede comprehension of non-conventional implicature, both in terms of accuracy and speed of comprehension. The conventionality effect was found to be strong when the convention was shared between L1 and L2, as in the case of indirect refusals in Japanese and English where it is common to provide a reason or excuse when refusing. Indirect requests, on the other hand, did not have the same level of conventionality effect because the linguistic forms encoded as convention (e.g., “Do you mind if” + verb) were unique to English. Consequently, processing time was slower.

The second study examined comprehension of implicature among L2 learners of English (Taguchi, 2013). The study traced development at two different levels: the accurate demonstration of pragmatic knowledge (knowledge of how to interpret implied intentions) and the processing capacity of this knowledge (the speed with which learners access and process information). Participants were 57 Japanese college ESL students in Hawaii and 60 Japanese college EFL students in Japan. All ESL students except one had a home-stay arrangement with local families who were native speakers of English, but all EFL students lived on campus and had another Japanese student as a roommate. A computerized listening test was developed to assess learners’ ability to comprehend conversational implicature. The test had 58 items: 24 conventional implicature, 24 non-conventional implicature, and 10 literal comprehension items. Conventional implicature included indirect refusals that took the form of giving an excuse to refuse someone’s invitation, request, or offer. Non-conventional items were written as expressions used to convey opinions in a non-literal manner and did not involve any discourse routines or conventions of language use. The study found that the degree of development
in accuracy and response speed was greater for conventional implicatures than for non-conventional implicatures. Conventional implicatures (indirect refusals) were easier and faster for the learners to comprehend and showed a robust development over a short period of time. Non-conventional implicatures were found to be both difficult to comprehend and late-developing. Although both ESL and EFL groups improved significantly in comprehension, when the degree of development was compared, the increase of speed was much smaller than that of accuracy for the ESL group, while the EFL group showed the opposite pattern: a greater gain in the accuracy score than in the response speed.

**Teaching L2 Pragmatics**

Having covered issues regarding the "what" of L2 pragmatics, the chapter will now consider how to teach the pragmatics of language behavior. There is a noticeable gap between what research in pragmatics has found and how language is generally taught today—thus, a rather weak link between theory and practice. The reason why this chapter has concentrated on pragmatics research in leading journals was precisely to underscore the importance of a research basis for choosing pragmatic materials to teach. Generally, explicit teaching about how language functions in discourse has been found to be more beneficial than leaving learners to figure out pragmatic behavior for themselves (Cohen, 2012b). In this section on L2 pedagogy, we will discuss in turn the teaching of requests, criticism, refusals, phatic communication, English as a lingua franca (ELF), materials development, digitally mediated contexts for learning pragmatics, and the assessment of pragmatics.

**Teaching Requests in an L2**

A study found that learners who had to discover implicitly the underlying rules for downgrading requests (i.e., figuring out how to link the sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic features in the information to various meanings conveyed by the downgrading of requests) had an advantage over those who just received explicit information about making requests (Takimoto, 2008). The learners who needed to induce the implicit rules were better able to process information about the target features and store this information in working memory than those who were provided the rules explicitly. So this finding may suggest tempering a bit our unbridled enthusiasm for explicit instruction of L2 pragmatics, in part because learners differ as to their learning style preferences (see, for example, Cohen, 2012a). In addition, some rules of L2 pragmatics are more readily taught than others.

**Teaching Criticism in an L2**

Looking at the explicit teaching of a less-taught speech act, a study evaluated the relative effectiveness of two types of form-focused instruction on the acquisition of the speech act set of constructive criticism of a peer’s essay writing by 69 Vietnamese learners of English (Nguyen, Pham, & Pham, 2012). Three high-intermediate EFL intact classes of pre-service EFL teachers (N = 69) were recruited. Over a 10-week course, the explicit group (N = 28) participated in consciousness-raising activities and received explicit meta-pragmatic explanations and correction of their errors in form and meaning. The implicit group (N = 19), on the other hand, participated in pragmalinguistic input enhancement and recast activities. The two treatment groups were compared with a control group (N = 22) on pre-test and post-test performance, consisting of a DCT, a role-play, and an oral peer-feedback task. There was also a delayed post-test comprising the same production tasks to measure long-term retention. The results revealed that both of the treatment groups significantly improved in the immediate post-test over the pre-test, outperforming the control group. The treatment groups also maintained their improvement
in the delayed post-test. Of note, the explicit instruction group performed significantly better than the implicit group on all measures.

**Teaching Refusals in an L3**

Another approach to pragmatics research regarding speech acts has been to look at the learning of pragmatics among multilinguals. One study examined the benefits that teaching the speech act of refusal from a discourse perspective had on L3 learners’ pragmatic knowledge (Alcón Soler, 2012). Retrospective verbal reports were used to examine the impact of instruction on attention and awareness of refusals and to explore whether receptive and productive bilingual learners resorted to pragmalinguistic, sociopragmatic, and linguistic information in different ways during the planning and execution of refusals. There were 92 university students learning English L3 pragmatics in the study, 40 who had acquired Catalan as their L1 and Spanish as their L2 (referred to in the study as productive bilinguals) and 52 students who had acquired Spanish as their L1 and Catalan as an L2 (termed receptive bilinguals). Pragmatic input was provided using excerpts from the *Friends* sitcom series, with the focus on refusals to invitations in a situation of power and social distance. The findings showed that teaching refusals at the discourse level increased the learners’ pragmalinguistic awareness of refusals in English L3, regardless of their degree of Catalan and Spanish bilingualism. In contrast, productive bilinguals outperformed receptive bilinguals in L3 metapragmatic awareness. The interpretation provided was that the productive bilinguals had greater communicative sensitivity, in large part because they were already making more contrasts between the Catalan and Spanish linguistic systems, and thus had a better sense of intended meanings and social variables affecting language use.

**Teaching Phatic Communication**

*Phatic communication*, or small talk, plays an important role in the pragmatics of social interactions. This non-referential use of language is enlisted in order to share feelings or establish a mood of sociability rather than to communicate information or ideas. Small talk can be used to create, maintain, and/or enhance friendly relationships. The problem for non-natives is that they may not know how to make small talk effectively, and didactic materials tend not to include it as an independent topic, nor do they neatly define it, distinguish its different manifestations, or address its sociocultural peculiarities (Padilla Cruz, 2013). Effective phatic communication requires a meta-pragmatic awareness of a wide range of complex and subtle issues, such as when and with whom to engage in it, the underlying reasons to do so, the types of phatic tokens that may be exchanged, the topics that such tokens may address, and the potential effects achievable. Based on an approach to teaching the pragmatics of specific L2 aspects (Martínez-Flor & Usó-Juan, 2006), a proposal was made for teaching phatic communication to non-natives (Padilla Cruz, 2013). More recently, interview data from 145 immigrants to Australia simply reinforced the view that teaching learners how to engage in small talk is advisable (Yates & Major, 2015).

**Teaching ELF**

In an increasingly global world, more people are communicating with each other in English, although it is not the native language of either speaker, in a context where there are no native speakers of English around to evaluate their pragmatics. So, as already queried earlier in this chapter, whose pragmatics do they use? A recent study performed qualitative analysis on a sample of data produced by a multicultural group of MA students for whom English was the *lingua franca* (Maiz-Árvalo, 2014).
The researcher investigated the extent to which learners stuck to their own culturally pragmatic rules and the extent to which they adhered to those of the target culture in a multicultural class where English was the medium of instruction and the language for students' peer-to-peer communication. The focus was on the speech act of disagreement, given its face-threatening nature and its disruptive potential if carried out in what interlocutors might perceive as the "wrong" way.

Ten students from different cultural backgrounds, studying English Linguistics at the Universidad Complutense of Madrid, were asked to carry out a group assignment. The negotiation and discussion process was computer-mediated via the use of forums within their university's Moodle program rather than face-to-face. This allowed the researcher to collect 15,598 words of naturally occurring, spontaneous written data. By participating in an online asynchronous discussion, the students did not have to fight for conversational turns, but rather were able to contribute to the discussion at their own pace. The findings revealed that students on the whole showed a tendency to avoid strong disagreement and instead to favor mitigated disagreement, such as the use of hedges, asking for clarification, and giving explanations. Moreover, students with high linguistic proficiency displayed a wider range of strategies and tended to follow the pragmatic rules of British English, since most of them had lived in the UK for a while before coming to Spain. Students whose linguistic proficiency was lower also showed a tendency to avoid strong disagreement, but they were much more limited with regard to their mitigating strategies, favoring the non-native overuse of expressions of regret and hedges.

Materials Development for L2 Pragmatics

While textbooks are often authorized and treated as unproblematic, especially in foreign language contexts, many of them still fall short in terms of appropriate language use in context (Pulverness, 2003; Ishihara, 2011). The goal of one recent study was to explore whether current discourse analytic research is reflected in the lessons and communication examples of five ESL textbooks used in Australia, by using spoken requests as the subject of investigation (Petraki & Bayes, 2013). The textbooks were evaluated on five criteria deriving from research on politeness, speech act theory, and conversation analysis. The criteria included whether and the extent to which the textbooks:

1. raised students' cross-cultural awareness of requests,
2. exposed students to different request forms: direct, conventionally indirect ("Would you mind . . . ?), and nonconventionally indirect (i.e., a hint, e.g., "My computer screen is frozen again . . . "),
3. adequately explored the contextual factors that affect the degree of politeness,
4. emphasized preferred or dispreferred responses (i.e., face-threatening),
5. exposed students to multi-turn request forms:
   • pre-sequences—e.g., "Excuse me, I'm sorry to bother you [PRESEQUENCE], but could you possibly get my case down for me? [REQUEST]."
   • re-requests—e.g., "Can you change the date on it? [REQUEST]," then re-requests with "Well, can't you just turn a blind eye? [RE-REQUEST]."

The study found that none of the coursebooks covered all of the criteria and that some coursebooks actually had very inadequate lessons. The results of the textbook analysis demonstrated that teachers using these five coursebooks and designers of future coursebooks would be advised to enhance their teaching of requests by drawing on pragmatics research and on authentic examples.

Despite the general neglect of pragmatics materials in L2 coursebooks, there have been some efforts to address this lack, such as the appearance of volumes which do provide samples of instructional

In order to provide an updated treatment of this topic, Ishihara and the author looked at (a) what we know, (b) what we think we know, and (c) what we need to find out with respect to materials development in L2 pragmatics (Cohen & Ishihara, 2012). The conclusion was that pragmatics is often neglected or only marginally treated in existing L2 curricula and that further development of L2 pragmatics materials would support teachers in preparing learners to understand and use language effectively in context, as well as to express their own voice as they wish in the target community.

**Learning Pragmatics in Digitally Mediated Contexts**

An area that has come into its own in research on L2 learning is that of language learner strategies and the application of strategies to the learning and performance of L2 pragmatics (Cohen & Sykes, 2013). The underlying concern is with the potentially important role of strategies in heightening learners' ability to make informed choices with regard to how they handle intercultural situations. The focus is on assisting learners in developing a more robust repertoire of strategies for their handling of pragmatics within intercultural communication. The aim is to support learners in building a toolkit of common pragmatic options that can be used as they co-construct communication in a variety of intercultural interactions.

To begin addressing these issues, a strategic approach to L2 pragmatics was included in a general website launched by the Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA) in 2001. Then a Japanese pragmatics website was launched in 2003, and a Spanish pragmatics website was launched in 2006. Both the Japanese and the Spanish websites benefited from research in cross-cultural pragmatics and from interventional studies investigating the effects of explicit pragmatics instruction on the development of pragmatic ability. Their goal was to employ web-based strategy instruction: to enhance learners' development and use of language learner strategies, to provide guidance in complex pragmatic language use that is difficult to "pick up," and to facilitate learning through web-based materials.

A taxonomy of strategies for learning and performing L2 pragmatics was applied to the construction of the Spanish pragmatics website, *Dancing with Words*, aimed at facilitating the learning of pragmatics appropriate for the Spanish-speaking world, with strategy material integrated into the website. Research was conducted by means of two studies, involving both this Spanish pragmatics website and a synthetic immersive environment (SIE), *Croquetlandia*, which was designed as a three-dimensional immersive space for the learning of pragmatic behaviors in Spanish (Cohen & Sykes, 2013). Results showed some reported differences in strategy use in the two different kinds of digital environments, with the finding of most relevance to the notion of intercultural education being that in the SIE, learners reported an increased use of metapragmatic strategies for dealing with L2 pragmatics. This finding highlighted the role of strategies in making informed choices about pragmatics.

The next step was to set up a CARLA wiki, where pragmatics researchers and instructors worldwide can contribute their insights and findings to promote L2 pragmatics. The main strategy will be to use crowdsourcing, namely, soliciting contributions from a large group of people, and especially from the online community. The goal will be to make the CARLA collection of L2 pragmatics information more varied than it currently is, with more on language variation across users and dialect variation as well. The site could include simulations where learners have the opportunity to produce L2 pragmatics. It could also include information on additional speech acts and revised
content based on the 10 or so years since the Japanese and Spanish websites were constructed (Cohen, 2016).

Assessment of Pragmatics

Although researchers are beginning to take greater interest in the assessment of L2 pragmatics (see, e.g., the edited volume by Ross & Kasper, 2013), classroom teachers may still avoid the assessment of pragmatics, especially non-native teachers who feel that they are incapable of judging what constitutes correct behavior. Nonetheless, there are sound reasons for assessing L2 pragmatics in the classroom (Cohen, 2014b):

- It sends a message to the students that their ability to be pragmatically appropriate in the comprehension and production of language in different sociocultural situations is a positive thing.
- Having such items on a test motivates students to study about the performance of speech acts.
- It gives teachers an opportunity to see the relative control their students have in what may at times be a significant area for L2 performance.
- It gives teachers an opportunity to see whether learners have learned the pragmatics that were included in the instruction.

A number of possible tasks have been suggested for assessing the comprehension of pragmatic performance. One approach is to have learners indicate how well they think someone else has performed pragmatically. There are also various ways to collect students' pragmatic production, such as through oral role-play, written discourse as if spoken, multiple-choice responses, or short-answer responses. It would appear that if speech act situations, for example, are made realistic and if guidelines are provided to teachers on how to rate key aspects of pragmatics, then assessment of pragmatics would be more prevalent (Cohen, 2014b).

Bardovi-Harlig and Shin (2014) argued that testing in pragmatics has for too long relied on the same six measures of pragmatics assessment introduced by Hudson, Detmer, and Brown (1992, 1995). They demonstrated that a wealth of potential test formats in the L2 pragmatics acquisition literature are as yet untapped resources for pragmatics testing. They introduced tasks that were used in pragmatic research, which they considered innovative in the context of assessment, and addressed the potential of each task to enhance task authenticity, their practicality for testing, and their potential for broadening our construct representation. By format, the tasks that they presented for consideration included oral production (oral for oral), written production (written for written), and audio and/or audio-visual conversational excerpts with written/read interpretations. By area of pragmatics, the tasks covered conventional expressions, pragmatic routines, conversational implicature, pragmaticality judgments, sociopragmatic judgments, interaction of grammar and pragmatics, and speech act identification. The production tasks simulated turns taking by providing unanticipated turns through computer generation or audio presentation, requiring responses from the test takers. They started with the production tasks and then moved on to consider interpretation, judgment, and prediction tasks.

Learning and Performing Pragmatics

L2 Developmental Issues for Children

Research has been conducted to describe developmental patterns in the interlanguage pragmatic comprehension of young learners of English. One such study looked at the performance of 176 seven-, nine-, and twelve-year-old Cantonese learners of English on a multiple-choice comprehension
exercise consisting of five direct and indirect speech acts (requests, apologies, refusals, compliments, and complaints) in contextualized dialogues, supplemented with verbal report data on the processing strategies from a subsample of 60 of these learners (Lee, 2010). The rationale for using more indirect speech act realizations was that children in early childhood (i.e., ages 6–9) gradually come to better understand and produce indirect speech acts as they become more aware of other ways to express intention and lose the default assumption that there is semantic congruence between a literal utterance and a speaker’s intended meaning. The overall mean comprehension scores increased steadily by age, with the difference in the scores across age groups only significant statistically between the seven- and nine-year-olds. All of the learners performed well in the comprehension of direct speech acts, but the seven- and nine-year-old learners encountered problems in comprehending indirect speech acts, particularly indirect refusals, compliments, and complaints. Their performance and processing strategies provide some evidence for the development of direct and indirect speech act comprehension in L2 learning—from relying on literal meaning or the semantic congruence between meaning and expression to other strategies, such as speaker intention and contextual clues, as they transit from early to middle childhood.

Adult Learning and Performance of L2 Pragmatics

While it is crucial to focus on teachers and their teaching of pragmatics, it is equally important to focus on learners and the strategies that they employ in an effort to ensure that the input that they process is pragmatically comprehensible to them. Likewise, attention needs to be given to the strategies that learners can use so that their output is comprehensible pragmatically to their interlocutors (Cohen, 2011). This entails taking a close look at specific examples of what comprehensibility of language at the level of intercultural pragmatics actually means. In looking at both the comprehension and production of pragmatic material, the strategies that might be called on in order to avoid pragmatic failure need to be considered (Cohen, 2005). So this means looking at what it might take strategically in order to effectively comprehend input pragmatically, whether the input is through language, gestures, or silence. A strategy for understanding cursing at the workplace, for example, would be to pull over a working associate and ask to be briefed on the various ways to curse appropriately in that context (e.g., when in anger, when in jest, considering issues of age, status, and gender, and so forth).

In addition, it would be advisable for learners to consider using strategies for avoiding pragmatic failure in the production of language. Hence, they would need to know which strategies to use in order to avoid negative transfer of norms from the L1 or another language, overgeneralization of perceived L2 pragmatic norms, and the effect of instruction or instructional materials. They would also need strategies for communicating appropriately even if they have only limited L2 grammar ability and strategies for dealing with their own resistance to abiding by the perceived L2 norms. Just with regard to avoiding negative transfer in dealing with speech acts, for example, learners may benefit from checking with local peers as to the most appropriate ways to respond to a compliment, as well as how to make requests that are likely to be responded to favorably in various situations in the given speech community. The ultimate concern is to identify strategies that might assist learners in their efforts to have their conversational partners correctly interpret the intended pragmatics in their communications, all the while being mindful of the role that teachers can play in facilitating this process.

Conclusion and Future Directions

This review of research literature on L2 pragmatics has sought insights for the teaching and learning of L2 pragmatics by first looking at approaches to research methods, since we can learn a good deal
about how to gather and analyze data from such studies. The conclusion to draw here is that the field of pragmatics is open to innovative research in a variety of areas.

With regard to the issue of politeness and impoliteness, the review made the point that control of pragmatics includes knowing how to perceive impoliteness and how to actually be impolite at times when called for (e.g., knowing how to curse). The point to take away from this discussion is that sociocultural appropriateness comes in all shapes and sizes.

Next, we considered research dealing with the nature of speech acts and then looked at cross-cultural speech act research. After that, the focus was on other areas of pragmatics of concern to L2 teachers: conversational overlap, backchanneling, humor and the use of laughter, sarcasm, the pragmatic function of discourse markers, deixis, and conversational implicature. This range of topics relating to L2 pragmatics research just underscores the challenges facing teachers as to what to teach and the commensurate challenges of learners in terms of what needs to be learned.

In an effort to move from theory to practice, the chapter also focused on pedagogy: teaching L2 learners a more-commonly-taught speech act (requests) and a less-commonly-taught speech act (criticism), teaching L3 learners a commonly taught speech act (refusals), teaching phatic communication, teaching pragmatics to ELF learners, materials development for L2 pragmatics, the learning of pragmatics in digitally mediated contexts, and the assessment of pragmatics. Of these issues, perhaps the ELF issue is the most provocative. Whose pragmatics should speakers use if they are interacting with other non-native speakers of English, without intervention by any native speakers? This issue is just beginning to be explored.

Finally, we focused on learners and on strategies for the learning and performing of pragmatics. While teachers can do lots of things to promote L2 pragmatics in the language classroom and beyond, the enormity of the learning task—as witnessed by all the topics covered in this review—means that learners would benefit highly from being proactive about their own learning in this domain. The more strategic that learners can be in this process, the better.

Notes
1. Aside from numerous trips to Japan and China, the author has traveled repeatedly to other Asian countries like Thailand and South Korea, where cultural aspects of pragmatics are at times in noticeable contrast to those in English-language cultures.
2. Which the researcher referred to as pragmatic markers.
3. Propagmatic refers to what constitutes appropriate linguistic forms for expressing the intent of the speech act, taking into account the norms of behavior that apply in the given situation. Sociopragmatic refers to the norms of behavior for realizing the given speech act in a given context, taking into account the culture involved, the relative age and gender of the interlocutors, their social class and occupations, and their roles and status in the interaction (Thomas, 1983).

References


