Strategy-based learning of pragmatics for intercultural education

Andrew D. Cohen and Julie M. Sykes
University of Minnesota / University of New Mexico

This chapter deals with an area that has come into its own in research on second language (L2) learning, namely, that of language learner strategies, and, in this specific case, the application of strategies to the learning and performance of L2 pragmatics. Consistent with the theme of this volume, 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 the underpinnings of two online spaces – a website and an online virtual space, both intended for the learning of pragmatic behavior appropriate in a variety of Spanish-speaking contexts. A taxonomy of strategies for learning and performing L2 pragmatics was applied to the construction of a website, Dancing with Words, aimed at learning the pragmatics appropriate for 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), Croquelandia, which was designed as a 3-D immersive space for the learning of pragmatic behaviors in Spanish. 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 discussed in this volume 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.
1. The role of pragmatics in intercultural education

If we take a critical look at efforts to instruct learners in second language (L2)\(^1\) pragmatics, then the aims of such instruction need to be revisited in light of concerns about what intercultural education actually entails. In the foreign language classroom, there may be tension between what is taught about the language and about the associated cultural, societal, political, and interpersonal beliefs that constitute and shape this language (Kramsch 2002). As pointed out in the introductory chapter of this volume, there has been terminological confusion, where terms like intercultural and multicultural have been treated interchangeably, with neither being adequately defined. In some contexts, there has also been an apparent lack of attention to the dynamic nature of intercultural interactions, with an idealized native speaker model taking precedence in the language classroom. A contrastive approach highlights boundaries between cultures, rather than accentuating the ways in which the cultures may actually overlap and points where individuals within any given culture may vary dramatically, instead, placing primary emphasis on the dynamic, hegemonic, and diverse notion of culture, even within seemingly similar groups. By helping learners develop skills to consider both the internal diversity within a given culture as well as commonalities that might appear in certain communities, an important emphasis is placed on the hegemonic nature of language and intercultural communication. This stands in stark contrast to approaches which view culture as monolithic and idealized. In short, from this perspective, culture is viewed as subjective constructions of lived experience, rather than as compact entities that are convenient for contrastive teaching.

In this chapter, we explore this complex relationship, focusing on learners’ control of strategies for developing genuine intercultural awareness so that their pragmatic performance is truly intercultural. The chapter will strive to make a connection between language learner strategies in the domain of intercultural pragmatics, as well as the field of intercultural education as a whole. The challenge is to develop in language learners, through their language learning experiences, the capacity to identify and respond to indications of linguistic differences in encultured behavior. A strategies approach is one way to highlight patterns that emerge while, at the same time, enabling learners to deal with a variety of

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1. For the purposes of this chapter, L2 will refer to the learning of either a second or a foreign language, though in reality there can be a marked difference between the two, since a second language is presumably being learned in a context where that language is used by the dominant language group and a foreign language is being learned in a context where the language may have far more limited use.
pragmatic behaviors. For example, in a lesson in L2 pragmatics dealing with requests to professors via email, it is important to highlight email requesting behaviors when writing to a professor in English in the U.S., a pattern which typically involves more indirect discourse with mitigation than the same request of a professor in Mandarin in China. However, stopping at this point does not address the dynamic nature of the requesting behaviors and may send the message that all requesting behavior is the same across speakers. In conjunction with what might be considered prototypical requesting patterns, learners should simultaneously develop strategies to learn, perform, and analyze the immense variation among each of these learning groups, highlighting the need for consistent analysis and adaptation of pragmatic behaviors in the L2. While some will undoubtedly view simultaneous attention to patterns and variation as contradictory, the perspective taken here is that both are essential to the development of intercultural pragmatic competence.

As proposed by Byram (1997) in his model of intercultural competence, L2 learners need to develop the attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, critical cultural awareness, and political education to be able to see the relationships among cultures different from their own. Development of intercultural education calls for taking a fresh look at beliefs about language and culture. L2 pragmatics has an important role to play in intercultural communication. Byram (1997: 3) points out that “…the efficacy of communication depends upon using language to demonstrate one’s willingness to relate, which often involves the indirectness of politeness rather than the direct and ‘efficient’ choice of language full of information.” L2 pragmatics addresses both the learners’ willingness to relate, as well as their ability to use language to do so.

More recently, the call has been made to engage in cultural pragmatics as a means for understanding how culture is created in complex situations:

To the extent that less emphasis is placed on form and culture, and more on the subject that acts and therefore interacts, we find ourselves within the domain of pragmatics… It is not about seeking hypothetical cultural realities, but rather comprehending a form of cultural pragmatics, understanding how the cultural is created in complex situations. (Abdallah-Pretceille 2006: 480)

So this view puts the responsibility on learners to deal with the intercultural complexity of the given situation, and pragmatics happens where language and culture meet (see Ishihara & Cohen 2010). The challenge in L2 pragmatic performance is interpreting intercultural meanings appropriately – which implies that as listeners or readers, learners are able to interpret the intended meanings of what is said or written, the assumptions, purposes or goals, and the kinds of actions that
are being performed (Yule 1996: 3–4). For speakers, high intercultural pragmatic ability means that these learners are aware of the norms for politeness, directness, and formality (for instance, in the role of teacher, telling students their work is unacceptable; or in the role of a student, complaining to the teacher about some aspect of a course). They are also aware of what members of a given sociocultural subgroup are likely to refrain from saying and what they are likely to communicate non-verbally.

So, taking a critical approach to interculturality, the onus is on educators to refrain from making claims about right and wrong ways to perform pragmatics, and rather to discuss performance in terms of students’ abilities to make informed choices about their communication. This approach allows for language learner strategies to be integrated into a more robust and less closed model of intercultural pragmatics. In this way, intercultural education moves beyond a ‘sensitivity to the essentially different behaviours and values of the other and to cultivate individuals who may employ the ability to read culture which derives from underlying universal cultural processes’ (Holliday 2011: 2).

For writers, high intercultural pragmatic ability means being fully aware of how locals of a culture write their messages intelligibly, incorporating level of politeness, directness, formality, and appropriateness of the rhetorical structure of the message (for instance, in the role of student, composing an e-mail message to their teacher requesting an extension on a term paper, or writing a message to a neighboring student to borrow a textbook). In each area, learners must be able to balance their own beliefs about culture with those of target-language speakers in each given situation—an endeavor that if performed appropriately, contributes to the quality of intercultural communication (Byram 1997; Kramsch 2002).

Nonnative participants in a speech community may or may not have a sense of norm-based pragmatic behavior for given situations. Coupled with that, they also have a set of beliefs and attitudes which color how they perform, sometimes causing divergent, non-congruent behavior which may impact the interaction. Very often, they are unaware that their behavior is considered divergent. At other times, however, they purposely diverge because to do otherwise would violate their sense of self-identity. In fact, research has been conducted addressing how learners of an L2 may purposely diverge from the pragmatic norms of a given speech community using that L2 (see Ishihara & Tarone 2009 on L2 learner subjectivity). For this reason, then, not only is the sociocultural context in which the interaction is taking place a crucial variable, but also how the interlocutors respond to it.

A critical approach to intercultural pragmatics would be to eschew the notion of mastery of a fixed body of knowledge, and rather to support the development in learners of the capacity to negotiate practices and conventions. Language learner
strategies play an important role in equipping learners with the necessary skills to engage interlocutors in negotiating interactions in intercultural situations. Learners need strategies for learning about L2 pragmatics expeditiously, strategies for performing according to pragmatic norms or for opting out, and strategies for coping with gaps when they do not know what to do (e.g., what to say at a funeral) and strategies for negotiating in the face of impending pragmatic failure.

There is at present a robust research literature on speech acts (see, for instance, Kasper & Rose 2002; Márquez Reiter & Placencia 2005; Alcón Soler & Martínez-Flor 2008). There is also a growing literature on the teaching of speech acts (e.g., Rose & Kasper 2001; Tatsuki 2005; Ishihara & Cohen 2010; Tatsuki & Houck 2010), as well as the use of computer-mediated technologies to facilitate L2 pragmatic development and intercultural competence (Belz 2007; Sykes 2005, 2009; Belz & Thorne 2005; González-Lloret 2010). What has been lacking, for the most part, in both theoretical and practical work, is any systematic attention to the strategies learners use to deal with L2 pragmatic behaviors, especially strategies for how to be differentially appropriate according to the subjective criteria of the given learners.

This chapter reports on beginning efforts to apply language learner strategies to the development of intercultural competence and, in particular, to the learning of speech acts, through a taxonomy which included strategies for learning speech acts, for performing them, and for monitoring the results (Cohen 2005). This taxonomy was included in the instructional content for two online environments for learning Spanish L2 speech acts: a website and an experimental online, 3D, immersive space. Each of the spaces was designed from the perspective that learners need support in identifying prototypical NS pragmatic behaviors as well as deciding how these norms should, or should not, apply to their own intercultural interactions. Findings from research with the online spaces are discussed in terms of insights gained with regard to the reported strategies for learning, performing, and analyzing L2 pragmatics. In this chapter, we focus on how these findings relate to promoting intercultural education.

2. Language learner strategies

It would be an understatement to say that language learner strategies have been defined in numerous ways over the years. Our own working definition would be as follows: “Thoughts and actions, consciously chosen and operationalized by language learners, to assist them in carrying out a multiplicity of tasks from the very onset of learning to the most advanced levels of target-language performance” (Cohen 2011:7). They can be very important for enabling learners to observe the
world around them and make conscious choices about their language use and behavior (see Cohen & Weaver 2006; Cohen 2007). Such strategies have been classified in different ways – for example, strategies for learning and use, strategies according to skill area, and strategies according to function (i.e. metacognitive, cognitive, affective, or social). Language learner strategies can be categorized as language learning strategies (i.e. strategies for the learning of language material for the first time) and language use strategies (i.e. strategies for using the material that has already been learned to some degree). Communication strategies are viewed as a type of language use strategy:

1. to steer the conversation away from problematic areas by expressing meaning through paraphrase or gestures,
2. to compensate for gaps by using literal translation from the L1, or
3. to keep the conversation going by asking for help, seeking clarification or confirmation, or using fillers (such as *uh* and *uhm*) for pauses, along with other hesitation devices such as repeating key words.

With regard to the function of strategies, metacognitive strategies are seen as highly valuable because they allow learners to control their language learning by planning what they will do, checking on progress, and then evaluating their performance on a given task (Chamot 1987; Oxford 1990, 2011). While the research literature suggests there is a positive relationship between learners’ reports that they use the metacognitive strategies and higher levels of language proficiency (Anderson 2008), there is at present little research evidence regarding the role of metacognitive strategies in the performance of L2 pragmatics, strategies which are referred to as metapragmatic. In the context of intercultural education, metapragmatic strategies would serve the crucial function of monitoring pragmatic performance so that it conforms to the intentions of the learner as well as the context of the specific intercultural encounter.

Cognitive strategies involve the processes, or mental manipulations, learners go through in both learning the L2 and in using it. Social strategies encompass the means employed by learners for interacting with other learners and native speakers (NSs). Affective strategies help learners to regulate their emotions and motivation, and to reduce anxiety while providing self-encouragement.

The field of language learner strategies has always had its detractors over the years. Dörnyei (2009: 183) minimized the value of looking at language learner strategies altogether since what learners do is better viewed as “idiosyncratic self-regulated behavior, and a particular learning behavior can be strategic for one learner and non-strategic for another.” Similarly, Oxford (2011) embraces a self-regulation model for L2 learning, but unlike Dörnyei’s approach, in Oxford’s model, learners actively and constructively use strategies to manage their own
learning. So, a compromise position might be to include self-regulation as perhaps an umbrella notion when referring to language learners and to also include the strategies that they use for both learning and performing in an L2. A recent article by Rose (2012), however, argues that Dörnyei’s reconceptualization might be a matter of throwing the baby out with the bathwater, in that it throws out a problematic taxonomy and replaces it with another one, which is also problematic – including the same ‘definitional fuzziness’ for which previous taxonomies have been criticized. So, for the purposes of this chapter, we will stick to the more “traditional” approach to viewing language learner strategies, without involving the concept of self-regulation.

In response to the claim that the language learner strategy theory is weak, there has appeared a volume replete with reviews highlighting the theoretical underpinnings of the strategy field (Cohen & Macaro 2007), and new volumes on language learner strategies – including a focus on strategy instruction – have also appeared (Oxford 2011; Cohen 2011). At the practical level, available teachers’ guides for strategy instruction (Cohen & Weaver 2006; Chamot 2009) would attest to the fact that strategy instruction for language learners is an ongoing and productive field. One of the more recent and explicit examples of strategy instruction in action would be found in the Spanish Grammar Strategies Website.2 There has also been an effort to embed strategies into L2 pragmatics instruction through websites for both Japanese3 and Spanish L2 pragmatics.4

While the application of strategies to the performance of L2 pragmatics is still in need of additional empirical investigation, we would assert that having facility with a repertoire of strategies for dealing with L2 pragmatics can assist learners in analyzing complex interactional situations – both in order to interpret the behavior of others and to perform in a desired way pragmatically in a variety of contextual and dialectal situations. Ultimately, it is left to learners to determine the appropriate pragmatic behavior for any given situation and to determine the extent to which they wish to conform to perceived idealized norms for how the members behave in terms of language and culture. In the best-case scenario, the pragmatics materials that are used for instructional purposes are empirically-based, rather than being generated by textbook writers on the basis of intuition.

This helps to establish pragmatic patterns that might be helpful to learners in a variety of contexts. Critical to the use of these materials is the recognition they are a guide and not an idealized absolute. Adherence to these materials is not the goal, but rather interpretation of the materials for use in a variety of intercultural interactions.

3. A strategic approach to the learning and performance of speech acts

The studies to be described here represented an effort to provide explicit strategy instruction to enhance the learning and use of appropriate pragmatic behaviors in Spanish. In doing so, we were careful not to assume a homogeneous set of pragmatic behaviors used by all speakers of Spanish. Rather, in referring to Spanish pragmatics, we addressed tendencies and empirically-based findings intended to aid learners when interacting with speakers of different varieties of Spanish. A strategic approach to L2 pragmatics enables learners to deal with both common patterns and variety simultaneously through observation, explicit inquiry, and experimentation.

While strategy instruction can take a number of different forms, it is likely to have the following features (from Rubin, Chamot, Harris, & Anderson 2007; see also Chamot 2008):

1. raising awareness of the strategies that the learners are already using,
2. presenting and modeling strategies so learners become increasingly aware of their own thinking and learning processes,
3. providing multiple practice opportunities to help learners move towards autonomous use of the strategies, and
4. getting learners to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies used, as well as their efforts to transfer these strategies to new tasks.

The effectiveness of strategy instruction with given learners depends on the specific learning context, the tasks at hand, and the characteristics of the learners (i.e. the learners’ background knowledge, their goals for learning the particular language, their style preferences, and their language strategy repertoire). While there is a growing literature on the impact of instruction in the use of speech acts (see, for example, Rose 2005), the literature on the impact of strategy use on the learning and performance of L2 pragmatic behavior was still in a fledgling state when our two studies were conducted.
3.1 A website for learning Spanish pragmatics

In an effort to make strategy instruction for pragmatics more concrete, a taxonomy was generated of strategies for learning L2 speech acts (e.g., observing what various NSs do by noting what they say, how they say it, and their non-verbal behavior), strategies for performing speech acts (e.g., using communication strategies to get the message across, like “I’m not sure how to say this right”), and metapragmatic strategies for evaluating strategy use (e.g., monitoring various elements of the communicative act, such as level of directness, terms of address, timing, organization, and sociocultural factors) (Cohen 2005). As pointed out above, metapragmatic strategies can serve an important role in the interpretation and performance of interculturality.

In order to validate this taxonomy empirically, a website was constructed for learning Spanish speech acts, Dancing with Words: Strategies for Learning Pragmatics in Spanish. The website consists of an introductory module as well as eight additional modules: (1) compliments, (2) gratitude and leave taking, (3) requests, (4) apologies, (5) invitations, (6) service encounters, (7) advice, suggestions, disagreements, complaints, and reprimands, and (8) considerations for pragmatic performance. Content and learning tasks on the website are similar in each of the modules and include examples from numerous varieties of Spanish (e.g., Venezuelan and Peninsular Spanish). By utilizing both general tendencies, as well as examples of specific dialect differences, our aim was to provide basic guidelines from which learners can choose, as well as specific differences that they will find across dialects. This approach was intended to provide learners the skills and content necessary to build a repertoire of both specific pragmatic behaviors, as well as the strategies for fine-tuning in a given context in a given speech community. Ideally, learners will come away with greater confidence about moving between different speech communities and adapting their behavior accordingly. Tasks include short-answer, multiple-choice, and listening activities. The activities are targeted at developing strategies for learning and performing L2 pragmatics both in general and with specific speech acts, and for evaluating their performance.

5. Cf. Note 4 above.

6. All the examples were taken from empirical work available at the time. This empirical work is still somewhat limited, making it impossible to give examples from all possible varieties of Spanish.
3.2 A synthetic immersive environment for practicing Spanish pragmatics

A second L2 pragmatics environment was also constructed by co-author Sykes and a team of programmers at the University of Minnesota. In order to help validate the strategy taxonomy, an experimental online L2 Spanish pragmatics environment, *Croquelandia*, was constructed, constituting what is referred to as a *synthetic immersive environment* (SIE) (Cohen 2008; Sykes 2008, 2009; Sykes & Cohen 2008, 2009). SIEs are online, multi-user virtual environments with an educational purpose. Their aim is to integrate the many benefits of multiuser online gaming spaces targeted at specific learning objectives (for a more detailed discussion see, for example, Sykes 2009; Sykes, Oskoz, & Thorne 2008; Thorne, Black, & Sykes 2009). Utilizing much of the content from the Spanish pragmatics instructional materials found in the first website, the SIE gave participants a chance to further explore their L2 pragmatic performance and to put into practice the skills and strategies targeted in the taxonomy. This space gave the learners an opportunity to hone the skills which would allow them to move beyond a learned system of prescriptive behaviors towards a repertoire of possible ways to approximate appropriate models for pragmatic behavior. In the context of intercultural education, there would now be an emphasis on making informed communicative choices, regardless of whether they approximate native-speaker norms.

This new virtual space allowed for assessment of both speech act performance, as well as students’ abilities to use the resources within the SIE environment in their efforts to interact successfully. Learners could move through the space and select various clues and tips, and then use what they had learned to interact with a native-speaker-controlled avatar in the virtual world. The interactions with NSs (a female from Colombia and a male from Spain) were targeted at specific language functions and allowed the learners to utilize the content and skills they had learned based on their experience with the interlocutor and the context. Although not explicitly taught a set of behaviors for the specific SIE interactions, the experience afforded the learners an opportunity to utilize the skills that they had learned for observing and adapting to different situations, which involved choosing from.

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7. As noted previously, the website materials include examples from numerous varieties of Spanish and different contextual situations, all which come from empirical data. The intention is to provide learners with concrete tendencies and potential patterns without assuming a homogenous set of behaviors that can be used in any variety of Spanish. Learning to discern language variety is an important component of L2 pragmatic competence, as well as intercultural competence.

8. An avatar is the virtual representation of one’s character in the online virtual space. One’s avatar is controlled by the user and can interact with features of the digital space.
pragmatic behaviors with which they were familiar. For example, learners needed to adjust their pragmatic behavior so that it was appropriate for interacting both with the Colombian female (e.g., more deference and indirect requests) and with the male Spaniard (e.g., more direct requests). It should be noted that although clearly a possibility in the real world, participants in Croquelandia were not given the communicative choice of opting out from performing these speech acts.

The research reported in this chapter represents a comparison of perceived strategies learners used in the two digital spaces, one involving the Spanish pragmatics website, *Dancing with Words*, and the other involving the virtual world, *Croquelandia*. The research question addressed was: How do learners perceive their strategy development for L2 Spanish pragmatics through the use of two different CALL environments, a self-access website and a synthetic immersive environment?

4. The research design

4.1 The design for Study 1

Study 1 involved a group of ten student participants (N = 5 females, N = 5 males). The results reported here are a subset of the findings from a larger study. For a description of the complete study see Sykes and Cohen (2008: 147–150). Due to space constraints, we describe in detail only the procedures relevant to this specific analysis. The participants had an average age of 23 and came from a variety of language learning contexts. All were enrolled in advanced level Spanish courses (i.e. beyond the introductory and intermediate levels), were NSs of English, and had an average reported grade-point average in Spanish of 3.63. The instructional website, *Dancing with Words*, played a major role in content delivery and was the only means of explicit pragmatic instruction available to the learners.

First, all subjects attended a general descriptive session about the project and completed the entrance survey. The survey section analyzed here consisted of one section specifically addressing strategies for L2 pragmatics based on the Cohen (2005) taxonomy. This survey is included as Appendix A. This session lasted 30 minutes. The subjects then completed a before-measure, a one-hour instructional session, three content modules, and an immediate and delayed after-measure. Each of the three online modules were from the *Dancing with Words* website (i.e.

9. While the current study did not address this issue of regional variation in norms for pragmatic performance, the ability to adapt to regional differences is a desired outcome in a strategic approach to L2 pragmatic development.
requests, apologies, and service encounters). Each was completed in a laboratory setting within a two-week period in an order selected by the participants who completed one module per session at a self-selected time. The requests and apologies modules each took approximately 90 minutes to complete and the service encounter module took the participants 1 hour.

Note that in Study 1, the before- and after-measures were conducted in what was then a rudimentary version of the SIE, used only to assess the students’ pragmatic ability, not as a learning environment for pragmatics which it evolved into. After completing both after-measures, the subjects engaged in retrospective, one-on-one interviews with the researcher. Each interview was audio-recorded and entailed questions addressing the learners’ evaluation of the experience, reported behavior, and suggestions for improvement of each of the website modules. The interviews were especially useful for gaining insights from learners regarding their experience with the online spaces and their perceptions of them. The interviews helped to provide a better understanding of the learners’ interactions in the digitally mediated spaces. They then completed an exit survey similar to the measure completed at the beginning of the project (see a sample in Appendix A). The survey data is most relevant to the current analysis.

4.2 The design for Study 2

Study 2 involved the use of Croquelandia, the space for delivery of the pragmatic materials (see Sykes 2008, 2009 for more details on this SIE).

In the SIE itself, learners could collaborate and interact in three primary areas – their host family’s house, a central plaza and market place, and the university (see Figure 1 for a view of the marketplace). Learners could move seamlessly among the three spaces using an interactive map in which they could click on the area to which they wanted to travel. In this SIE, learners were able to move an avatar throughout the environment and talk with other learners via avatar interaction. While the interlocutors (i.e. the learners) only saw each other virtually, they were able to interact with one another via voice chat and written chat.

As was the case with Study 1, the results reported here are a subset of the findings from the study as a whole. For a description of the complete study see Sykes (2008: 87–90). In Study 2, 25 participants reported their perceptions of the impact the materials had on their strategizing about pragmatics. Much as with Study 1, an entrance survey in this study was designed to collect demographic and experiential information from each of the learners prior to the start of the instructional activities. The purpose was to obtain self-report from students as to
the speech-act learning and performance strategies that they were already using (see the Appendix).

Upon completion of the entrance survey, the participants completed a before-measure, two class sessions dedicated to pragmatics, two modules in the SIE (i.e. one targeted at requests and the other at apologies), a one-on-one midpoint interview with the researcher, a group presentation, an after-measure, an exit interview, and an exit survey. The participants’ exit survey was used to obtain an after-measure of perceived strategy use. In both studies, the measure of strategy use was based on perception, rather than on actual use.

4.3 Procedures for data analysis

The data from learners’ reported strategy use in the three categories of pragmatic strategies from the before- and after-measures for both Study 1 and 2 (strategies for learning L2 pragmatics, strategies for using pragmatics, and metapragmatic strategies) were submitted to analysis. In each survey, the respondents evaluated their own strategy use on an ordinal scale as follows: seldom/never = 1, somewhat likely/sometimes = 2, likely/often = 3, very likely/very often = 4, almost always = 5, and don’t know = 0. For the purposes of this analysis, a change rate of less than .5 was considered as no change. A change rate between .5 and 1 in either direction was considered a minor increase or decrease. A change rate greater than 1 in either direction was considered a moderate change. In the case of a strategy dealing with learning style preference (U-6), the subjects in Study 1 were queried using one survey item whereas in Study 2, two items were used to examine individual style (i.e. cognitive style and personality). In this case, the two items in
Study 2 were averaged for the purpose of comparison to the item in Study 1. Due to the small sample size and different groups of learners in each study, the results could not be verified through calculation of statistical significance. Hence, these findings have to be taken as merely suggestive of possible trends in the data. They should be interpreted as an initial starting point for analysis.

5. The findings

First, with regard to reported frequency of strategies aimed at learning L2 pragmatics, strategies exhibiting a minor increase in reported use in both studies were gathering information on how the speech acts were performed (L-4) and paying attention to what native speakers did by noting what they said, how they said it, and their non-verbal behavior (L-6). In Study 1 of the research, there was also a moderate change in asking NSs to model how they performed the speech acts (L-2) and identifying the speech acts to focus on (L-3), and a minor change in strategy referring to published sources (L-1). Overall, results for the learning strategies category suggested a greater reported frequency of use of learning strategies from participation in the online website activities in Study 1 than in the SIE experience in Study 2 (see Table 1).

In terms of reported frequency of strategies for using L2 pragmatics, a similar picture emerged, with a greater increase in reported frequency of use for strategies in Study 1 than in Study 2. There was a minor reported increase in remaining true to own cultural identity and personal values (U-1) in both studies. In Study 1 alone, there was a moderate reported increase for asking for feedback on pragmatic abilities from natives (U-3), and a minor reported increase for practicing in order to improve pragmatic skills (U-4) and attending to own learning style preferences (U-6). So overall, there was some reported increase in language use strategies after having participated in the online website activities in Study 1, and virtually no reported change after participation in the SIE in Study 2 (see Table 2).

In terms of reported frequency of strategies for supervision of strategy use, there appeared to be a minor increase of use in both studies for paying attention to pre-planning (M-1), and just for Study 2 in deciding whether to focus on comprehension, performance, or both (M-2) (see Table 3).
### Table 1. Reported frequency of strategies for learning pragmatics (adopted from Sykes & Cohen 2009)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Study 1</th>
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<th>Study 2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Before</td>
<td>After</td>
<td>Change</td>
<td>Before</td>
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<td>Change</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>SD</td>
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<td>SD</td>
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<tr>
<td>L.1: I will refer to published material (e.g., articles, websites) dealing with communicative acts.</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L.2: I will ask natives to model how they perform the communicative act.</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L.3: I will identify the communicative acts (i.e., requests, apologies, compliments) that I want/need to focus on.</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>1.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L.4: I will gather information (through observation, interviews, written materials, movies, radio) on how the communicative acts are performed.</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>1.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L.5: I will conduct my own cross-cultural analysis (e.g., identify norms and strategies specific to a given communicative act like “requesting,” determine the similarities and differences between my first language and Spanish).</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>1.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L.6: I will pay attention to what native speakers do by noting what they say, how they say it, and their non-verbal behaviour.</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>1.65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 2. Reported frequency of strategies for using pragmatics (adopted from Sykes & Cohen 2009)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Study 1</th>
<th>Study 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Before measure</td>
<td>After measure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U-1: I will remain true to my own cultural identity and personal values while still being aware of the cultural expectations of native speakers.</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>0.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U-2: I use communication strategies to get the message across (e.g., “I’m not sure how to say this right,” repair when necessary, attempt to follow native speaker examples).</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U-3: I ask native speakers for feedback on my pragmatic abilities.</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U-4: I practice (e.g., role-plays, imaginary situations, conversations with native speakers) in order to improve my pragmatic skills.</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>1.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U-5: I will devise and utilize memory strategies for retrieving the communicative act materials that has already been learned.</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>0.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U-6: I will determine my style preference as a learner and try approaches that are consistent with my individual style.</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3. Reported frequency of metapragmatic strategies (adopted from Sykes & Cohen 2009)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Study 1</th>
<th>Study 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Before measure</td>
<td>After measure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M-1: I will be conscious of the necessity for pre-planning.</td>
<td>3.0  0.81</td>
<td>3.50 1.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M-2: I will decide what my focus is. Performance? Comprehension? Both?</td>
<td>3.3  1.15</td>
<td>3.10 1.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M-3: I will monitor my performance of communicative acts (e.g., level of directness, terms of address, timing, organization, sociocultural factors).</td>
<td>2.6  1.07</td>
<td>3.05 1.21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6. Discussion and conclusions

6.1 Discussion

This chapter has looked at strategizing about pragmatic performance in two different kinds of environments. Study 1 looked primarily at the reported strategies used by learners to access information about how to perform L2 pragmatics from a website (“Dancing with Words”) where they appeared in various formats. Study 2 had the learners in an experimental environment where learners were able to interact with avatars and add pragmatic knowledge more experientially. The argument we are making is that learning about pragmatics does not just happen by osmosis for the most part. Learners need their awareness heightened, and furnishing them with specific strategies for making more informed choices in their pragmatic performance seems to us to be of keen value in our increasingly global world where insularity no longer works. This study would seem to suggest that orienting learners to strategies for performance of L2 pragmatics in an interactive and self-selective way can make a difference for interculturality.

These findings would suggest that participation in the two distinct types of mediated contexts – the self-access website and the SIE – may have had a slightly different impact on the reported use of the three types of strategies. With regard to strategies for learning and performing pragmatics, two learning strategies (L-2: Ask native speakers to model how they perform the communicative act, and L-3: Identify the second language speech acts learners want/need to focus on) and a use strategy (U-3: Ask native speakers for feedback on your pragmatic abilities) are especially noteworthy because there was a moderate increase in perceived use from the participants in Study 1 and no change in Study 2. One feasible explanation for this difference across the two studies may be the emphasis on the use of an NS as a resource for pragmatic learning in the website itself. While caution needs to be taken in suggesting an ideal NS model, the use of NSs as a starting point helps provide some benchmark for the development of L2 pragmatics. In the activities on the website, learners utilized a variety of models and examples to improve their awareness of pragmatic choices. However, for additional information they would need to talk with many NSs in the real world and, as a result, were instructed to do so. In the SIE, learners were not explicitly encouraged to talk with NSs outside of the virtual space. Therefore, participants in Study 2 may

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10. We do not intend to imply that learners should try to emulate NS behavior, especially given that the notion of the native speaker can be problematic and given the learners’ need to maintain their own identity. See, for example, Kramsch and McConnell-Ginet (1992), Thorne (2005), and Ishihara & Tarone (2009) with regard to learner subjectivity.
not have viewed explicitly asking for help from NSs as a necessary resource for pragmatic development. While some may argue against the value of a NS as the expert in determining appropriate pragmatic behavior, learning to utilizing NSs as resources can, in all reality, be very helpful for learners. Furthermore, dialogue about pragmatic aspects of language (e.g., what actually counts as an apology), can help spark introspection and discussion about cultural assumptions and beliefs and the ways these vary among members of the same community, an aspect of intercultural education that is vital for understanding the dynamic nature of culture in general.

With regard to metapragmatic strategies, in the Dancing with Words website, explicit identification and exploration of each of the strategies was included as part of the instructional activities. In the SIE, the strategies-based approach entailed experiential learning. That is, instead of explaining to the learners how they might use a specific strategy to improve their pragmatic abilities (the case of the website), the SIE quests and activities required that learners implement each of the strategies through practice and use. The distinct delivery method of instruction may explain the slight differences found in the learning and use strategies categories, especially with regard to greater increase in strategy M-1 in Study 2. It would appear that the Study 2 subjects employed and practiced metapragmatic strategies more as they worked in the immersive space and while participating in their in-class group activities. This is a noteworthy advantage of SIEs for the development of strategies for gaining greater intercultural awareness. Learners are able to experiment with different points of view and implement different strategies to explore potential outcomes, thereby developing two areas viewed as critical in Byram’s (1997) approach – the skills of interpreting and relating and the skills of discovery and interaction.

6.2 Limitations

The first limitation of this research is that since it was not possible to use measures of statistical significance, the findings are simply suggestive. Secondly, in considering these results, it is important to remember that the findings are based on learner report, and not on actual use. Learners reported the strategies they would use for improving their pragmatic abilities based on their experience in each of the environments. Retrospective, self-observational data may not be completely accurate, depending on the amount of elapsed time from the events themselves, and so the verbal report data are not necessarily indicative of how the strategies were actually used (Cohen 2011). An additional consideration was the use of two distinct sets of students to compare the perceived strategy use of each of the mediated contexts.

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6.3 Suggestions for future research

Future research should utilize other measures for confirming actual strategy use to complement the self-reported perception data used in this analysis, as well as its impact on intercultural awareness. Such measures could include, for example, think-aloud protocols, observation of user behavior, targeted measures for examining language variety distinctions, recording in the digitally-mediated spaces, and scenarios targeted at assessing the use of specific types of strategies. Future studies should also consider perceived strategy development in each of the mediated contexts by the same learners. Additionally, it would be beneficial to investigate both whether the use of these strategies does indeed enhance pragmatic abilities and whether learners are actually using the strategies they say they are using. Since there is increasing evidence that the conscious use of strategies in other skill areas can have a significant impact on both the learning and performance of language (see for example, Cohen & Macaro 2007; Griffiths 2008; Hurd & Lewis 2008), there is every reason to believe that this would be the case for L2 pragmatics as well.

6.4 Pedagogical implications

Although the results from this research are by no means definitive, they still would suggest the value of including strategies for the learning and performance of speech acts, as well as for metapragmatic evaluation of their impact on intercultural awareness and the making of informed choices. For too long, the field of language learner strategies has lacked the fine-tuning necessary for tackling the more complex and challenging aspects of language learning, such as L2 pragmatics and intercultural competence. The results of this study speak to the benefits of making accessible to learners through digitally-mediated spaces the strategies that may help learners engage in pragmatically informed interactions. In addition, with the emergence of new technologies such as SIEs, we now have the opportunity to create learning spaces specifically for addressing challenging complexities associated with L2 pragmatics (Sykes 2009; Sykes, Oskoz, & Thorne 2008) and to assess the impact of such spaces on intercultural education.

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11. Although not reported here, screen capture through the software Camtasia was used in both the website and SIE to observe learner behaviors.
6.5 Conclusions

The purpose of this chapter has been to highlight the potential role of language learner strategies in the development of L2 pragmatic awareness within the domain of intercultural education. Strategies for performing pragmatics can contribute to a learner's repertoire for dealing with performance at the intersection of language and culture. This includes enabling them to deal with prototypical pragmatic patterns from a dynamic perspective and making informed choices about their own behavior. Hence, we see the value of strategy instruction in L2 pragmatics, as well as research focused on its impact. Strategy instruction enables learners to move beyond language to culture – supporting them in developing interpretative capabilities so that they can make truly informed choices about just how pragmatically appropriate they wish to be.

This chapter also serves to highlight the critical role L2 pragmatic abilities play in the larger arena of intercultural education. By integrating L2 pragmatic instruction with other elements of intercultural education, bridges can be built to emphasize the fact that at times language and cultural elements are inseparably bound together. Pragmatic assumptions must be informed through intercultural experiences. By giving learners the skills to perform communicative acts as intended, we enable access to a wealth of opportunities that might not otherwise be possible.

References


### Appendix: Survey of strategies for L2 pragmatics (from Sykes 2008)

#### C. Evaluating your strategies for learning Spanish pragmatics

Rate your use of each of the strategies below to improve your own pragmatic ability in Spanish. If you are not sure what the strategy is, please mark the “Don't know” option.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Seldom / never</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Very often</th>
<th>Almost always</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I determine my style preferences as a learner and try approaches that are consistent with my individual perceptual style (visual, auditory, or hands on).</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I try approaches that are consistent with my individual cognitive style preferences (e.g., global or detail-oriented, abstract or concrete, summarizer or analytic).</td>
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<tr>
<td>I try approaches that are consistent with my individual personality (extrovert/introvert, reflective/impulsive, open/closure-oriented).</td>
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<tr>
<td>I identify the language functions (i.e., requests, apologies, compliments) that I want/need to focus on.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I gather information (through observation, interviews, written materials, movies, radio) on how the communicative acts are performed.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I devise and utilize memory strategies for retrieving the communicative act material that has already been learned.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I conduct my own “cross-cultural” analysis (e.g., identify norms &amp; strategies specific to a given communicative act like “requesting,” determine similarities and differences between my first language and Spanish).</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I pay attention to what native speakers do by noting what they say, how they say it, and their non-verbal behavior.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I ask native speakers to model how they perform the communicative act.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I refer to published material (e.g., articles, websites) dealing with communicative acts.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>I monitor my performance of communicative acts (e.g., level of directness, terms of address, timing, organization, sociocultural factors).</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>I practice with pragmatics (e.g., role-plays, imaginary situations, conversations with native speakers) in order to improve my pragmatic skills.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I ask native speakers for feedback on my pragmatic abilities.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use communication strategies to get the message across (e.g., “I’m not sure how to say this right,” repair when necessary, attempt to follow native speaker examples).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I remain true to my own cultural identity and personal values while still being aware of the cultural expectations of native speakers.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I decide what my focus is. Production? Comprehension? Both?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am conscious of the necessity for pre-planning.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>