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Integrating Pragmatics into the MA-TESL Program: Perspectives from Former Students

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Abstract

This article describes a semester-long course focusing on pragmatics and language teaching, which is a curricular requirement in a Master's TESL program at one U.S. university. An exploratory study was conducted with a sample of students who had taken the course in the past 5 years, to determine whether they had been able to incorporate what they learned in the pragmatics course into their subsequent ESL/EFL (and, in some cases, other language) teaching. Participants' responses to open-ended items on an email questionnaire were analyzed for emergent themes. The article reports on the primary topic areas and techniques participants use to teach pragmatics to their ESL/EFL learners, the major obstacles facing teachers in bringing pragmatics into their language classrooms—as well as a few unexpected learning outcomes that students associated with this course. We conclude with a set of suggestions for other TESL educators who may also be interested in teaching students about pragmatics.

Keywords: pragmatics, language teacher education

Introduction

A number of influential models of communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980; Bachman & Palmer, 1996) recognize that becoming a competent second language user involves knowing more than just the correct rules and forms of a language—it also involves knowing how to use language in socially appropriate ways. In other words, to be a competent language user, an individual must have the ability to produce utterances which are grammatical as well as appropriate to the context in which they are made, considering the participants, their relationships, as well as the (often unstated but assumed) social rules for interaction. The field of linguistic pragmatics covers a broad range of topics and phenomena

(e.g., presupposition, definiteness, reference), however in terms of second and foreign language teaching, pragmatics has most often been conceptualized as having to do with speech acts, language functions, and linguistic politeness.

Since the early days of second language acquisition (SLA) research, it has been recognized that when an individual studies a second language, pragmatic competence does not automatically develop at the same pace as grammatical competence (e.g., Schmidt, 1983; Swain, 1985). In reality, acquiring pragmatic ability in an L2 can be slower than learning other aspects of the language. In fact, a number of SLA researchers have observed that "many advanced language learners are able to utilize complex linguistic systems, but are unable to express and interpret meaning in order to perform language functions (e.g., apologies, requests) appropriately" (Cohen, 2008, p. 226). For example, Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1993) have shown how even highly proficient second language learners differ systematically in their pragmatic performance from their native-speaking counterparts. This is not surprising in light of Olshtain and Blum-Kulka's claim (1985, in Cohen 2008) that the process of becoming pragmatically competent in a second language can take 10 or more years. Consequently, Bardovi-Harlig and Mahan-Taylor (2003) have argued that L2 instruction should attend to matters of pragmatics, because "the majority of learners apparently do not acquire the pragmatics of the target language on their own" (p. 3).

Research has also indicated that instruction on the pragmatic features of a target language can make a positive difference on the journey to acquiring L2 pragmatic competence—and that there may be a slight advantage for explicit instruction than for more implicit types of instruction (Jeon & Kaya, 2006). Surveying the research that has examined the effectiveness of pragmatics-focused instruction, a number of scholars (e.g., Cohen, 2005; Kasper, 2001; Rose, 2005) argue that instruction does facilitate acquisition of some aspects of pragmatic competence. Additionally, drawing on his own experiences as a language learner, Cohen (2008) argues that "pragmatic performance benefits from explicit instruction," and that "there is value in explicitly teaching second-language (L2) learners pragmatics" (p. 213).

For pragmatic instruction to happen in the FL/SL classroom, of course, requires that pragmatics actually forms a part of the language teacher's content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge base. Some scholars (Bardovi-Harlig & Mahan-Taylor, 2003; Cohen, 2005; Eslami-Rasekh, 2005; Ishihara, 2007) have suggested that pragmatics—as well as strategies for teaching pragmatics in the language classroom—is an area that is not adequately addressed by most TESL teacher preparation programs.[1] A recent survey of approximately 100 MA-TESL programs around the United States (Vásquez & Sharpless, 2009) addressed this very issue, and found empirical evidence for this claim. More specifically, Vásquez and Sharpless's survey found that although most programs have specific courses dedicated to phonology or to syntax, the majority of programs do not have a course dedicated to pragmatics. In many cases, the programs surveyed address pragmatics in a piecemeal fashion: for example, by covering linguistics politeness for 1-2 weeks in a Sociolinguistics course, or spending 1 week in a Teaching Methods course addressing speech acts, or perhaps mentioning issues related to the acquisition of pragmatic competence at some point in an SLA course. In essence, the survey found that very few programs have a clearly defined space in

their curriculum for treating pragmatics. In the words of one MA-TESL director: "Pragmatics is something we try to weave in the best that we can. It is addressed as it comes up" (Vásquez & Sharpless, 2009, p. 22). Furthermore, the survey findings indicated that although many MA-TESL faculty expressed an interest in exposing their students to pragmatics in a more principled fashion, they had not yet figured out where it should "fit" in their curriculum.

This represents an issue that our program faced as well. Thus, six years ago, when the primary author inherited a "Contrastive Analysis" course that had been previously taught by a theoretical linguist, she decided to approach the course from a more applied perspective. Because the traditional approach to contrastive analysis had been on the decline in the field of SLA since the 1970s, she decided to take a "contrastive discourse" approach to the class, and to focus primarily on cross-cultural pragmatics, as well as on related implications for language teaching.

Our Course

In the following section, we first describe our MA-TESL program's approach to providing instruction on pragmatics to practicing and prospective language teachers. We then discuss the findings of a small-scale study we conducted, which was designed to tap students' impressions of this course, as well as their subsequent teaching experience with pragmatics. We conclude by discussing the implications of our findings, and by making a few recommendations for MA-TESL programs, or for individuals who may be interested in teaching their students about pragmatics.

Readings & Topics

The semester-long (16 week) "Contrastive Analysis" course is a curricular requirement, and is normally taken by MA-TESL students in their third semester in the program. At this point, students have already completed courses such as *Introduction to Linguistics*, *Introduction to Research Methods,TESL Methods*, and *Grammar*, which have provided them with a basic foundation in applied linguistics. The required textbook for the Contrastive Analysis/ Cross-Cultural Pragmatics course is *Intercultural Communication*, 2nd edition, by Ron Scollon and Suzanne Wong Scollon, which was selected deliberately for its contrastive discourse approach. To supplement the assigned textbook chapters, students are also assigned readings from scholarly journals as well as chapters from other books (see Appendix for the course reading list).

In class, weekly discussions center on these readings, and cover topics such as power and politeness, speech acts (e.g., apologies, requests, compliments) information structure, face work, conversational inference, as well as pedagogical applications related to these topics. In addition to class discussion, students are asked to complete hands-on tasks and activities in class. For example, the week that students read Vellenga's (2004) study on coverage of pragmatics in ESL textbooks, students bring their own language textbooks to class, and working in groups, they compare Vellenga's findings with the textbooks they use for their own language teaching and/or learning. In another activity, after reading the article by Jiang (2006), which compares suggestion formulae in ESL textbooks with those found in naturally-occurring discourse (i.e., in the TK2-SWAL corpus), students have the opportunity to

replicate Jiang's corpus findings, by conducting their own searches for the same suggestion formulae in the Michigan Corpus of Spoken Academic English (MICASE). A similar type of activity is described in Chapter 9 of Ishihara and Cohen (2010).

Course Assignments

For course assignments, students write a series of short papers, in which they are expected to apply research findings to actual teaching scenarios. In one of the first papers, students are asked, following Washburn (2001), to develop a short ESL lesson on a particular speech act they have found in a television program, or in a movie. In another assignment, students analyze an authentic email exchange between Japanese and American business partners as an example of real-life intercultural miscommunication. Using their knowledge of linguistic politeness, negative and positive face, directness/indirectness, and pragmatic failure, students describe what went wrong in this email interaction, as well as how it might be fixed.

For their final projects, students are required to complete either a teaching module or a small research project related to pragmatics—in both cases, they must apply some of the knowledge they have gained throughout the course in their final project. If students select the teaching module, they must provide a description of the specific teaching context (which can be one in which they have previously taught or studied, or one which is a projection of where they hope to teach after graduating from the program). For example, one student from Germany (Nicola, 2006), developed an "intercultural pragmatics awareness raising workshop" focusing on differences in German and American small talk. The examples and activities she created were based on personal frustrations that she herself had experienced as a German exchange student in the U.S., as well as what she learned from the relevant research literature.[2]

Students selecting the research option have completed a wide variety of projects. Typically, these are small-scale studies which have used focus group interviews, surveys, or DCTs—and often, they are modeled to some extent on a research study that the class has read. Recently, for example, one student used a DCT (an adaptation of an existing instrument by Blum-Kulka et al, 1989) to explore the relationship between the occurrence of the word *please* in requests and the demographic variable of age. Prior to carrying out her investigation, this student had been quite convinced that older individuals would use *please* much more than younger speakers. She was amazed when her own findings did not match her expectations. She wrote in her final paper: "So adamant that I was correct about the generational issue, it was disconcerting to discover how totally off the mark I was. During the process, I wondered what else I might be so wrong about. Yes, our existence is the sum of filtered beliefs, experiences, etc., but how do we inspect those filters? …In sum, it might simply be a willingness to continue to posit research questions without a certainty or attachment to the outcome" (Mara Lee, 2008). Her thoughtful reflection here speaks not only to the findings of her specific study, but also to the much-discussed issue of the unreliable nature of native-speaker intuitions about actual language use (e.g., Biber, Conrad & Reppen, 1994; Boxer & Pickering, 1995; Wolfson, 1986).

Method

In order to discover what students had retained from the course and how they were able to use that knowledge in their subsequent language teaching, in Spring 2010, a brief questionnaire was sent by email to all of the students who had taken the Contrastive Analysis/Cross-Cultural Pragmatics course over the past five years, and for whom contact information was available. Approximately 50% of these former students responded, yielding a total of 23 participants. Two broad areas were addressed in this questionnaire, which included: 1) What ideas, topics, readings, activities, or assignments from the course were most memorable? and 2) In what ways have participants incorporated information about pragmatics into their teaching? (Or—if they have not done so—why not?)

Nearly all of the study's participants had completed at least one semester's worth of English language teaching, in the form of a one-semester internship in the university's Intensive English Program (IEP), which is a curricular requirement for all students in the MA-TESL program. Following graduation, many of these students continue to work as ESL instructors in this same IEP. Others teach, or have taught, ESL in local community colleges. And still other participants teach, or have taught, ESL or Language Arts in K-12 schools. Additionally, a handful of students teach, or have taught, foreign languages such as Spanish, Japanese, and Chinese, in various contexts. (Some participants taught a foreign language as graduate teaching assistants while they were students in the MA-TESL program; whereas other participants currently work as teachers of languages other than English, either in local high schools or in universities abroad.) Typically, students enter the MA-TESL program with zero to two years' prior teaching experience. However, there are typically a few students who enter the program with more extensive (i.e., five or more years of) prior language teaching experience. We refer to these individuals as "experienced" teachers in the following section. At the time that they completed our questionnaire, the majority of participants (85%) had taught – or were currently teaching – EAP at a university intensive English program, or at a community college. In addition, 6 of the 23 participants were pursuing a doctoral degree in a related field.

In order to analyze our questionnaire data, we used constant comparison method and each of us coded the data independently for emergent themes. After completing a round of individual coding, we compared results, consolidated categories, and resolved the few remaining differences through discussion. Where relevant, we provide illustrative quotations directly from our participants. Some of our participants wished to be identified, while others asked to be referred to by a pseudonym; in our findings below, we refer to individuals according to their preference. We also include the year they took the course, to give readers a sense of the representativeness of our sample.

Findings

In the following section, our discussion of findings has been organized into three broad themes: ways in which former students have been able to incorporate pragmatics into their subsequent language teaching; some of the challenges that our participants have experienced with respect to incorporating pragmatics into their language teaching; and finally other – less anticipated – outcomes related to learning about pragmatics.

Incorporating Pragmatics into Language Teaching

Our participants have been able to incorporate their knowledge of pragmatics into their language teaching in various ways. For example, one former student, who taught EFL at a university in China, was able to draw on what she learned about pragmatics in developing her own curriculum for an elective course.

> I taught English Listening and Speaking and English Communications classes. My students ranged from freshmen to juniors. Because I had the freedom to create my own curriculum, it was the ideal setting for teaching pragmatics. [. . .] I built different segments into my syllabus like making requests, making apologies, and smaller gambits like expressing like/dislike. I even incorporated directness/indirectness and factors that affect politeness into the curriculum. I felt like incorporating pragmatics gave my class substance and was appropriate for a university class that already knew the basics of English. Students with lower English ability were able to grasp onto discourse structure that they could use in the future in speaking or writing English and I think the more advanced English students appreciated looking at underlying issues of pragmatics (like politeness) that they probably had not examined before. (Lilly, 2006)

However, this participant's experience—especially the freedom she had to design her own curriculum—was somewhat exceptional. Our findings suggest that the majority of participants usually do not plan entire lessons around pragmatics. Instead, they tend to incorporate pragmatics into existing materials or whenever a classroom situation presents itself. Another participant's comments illustrate this general tendency: "I teach pragmatics any time I can! Mostly, I don't incorporate pragmatics into my lessons as much as I address it when it comes up. For example, if a student says, '*What?*' in class to ask for clarification, we talk about proper ways to ask '*Excuse me, could you repeat that, may I ask a question?*' I talk about how to use contextually appropriate language as it comes up" (Denise, 2007). Similarly, several other participants discussed examples of how they, too, transformed existing lesson plans and everyday classroom situations into points of departure for pragmalinguistic understanding to take place.

When our participants did find opportunities to address pragmatics in a more pre-planned fashion in their language classrooms, they most often mentioned introducing their students to various speech acts. The speech acts that were most frequently reported by our participants include: requests, apologies, suggestions, complaints, expressing like/dislike, and expressing agreement/disagreement. While speech acts were the most common discourse-level pragmatics topic, modals were the most common linguistic feature that our participants mentioned. Several participants indicated that modals were frequently used as a way to introduce notions of linguistic politeness to students. For example, one teacher who taught an advanced-level EAP writing class at the university level, shared his experiences of encouraging his students to "reflect on appropriate academic discourse and how we can respectfully disagree and use modals as a means to lessening the likelihood of offending others" (Carter, 2005). In contrast, another teacher of university-level EAP indicated that she

found it a challenge to teach students that using modals may not be the most appropriate linguistic choice for every situation: "In Grammar [class], discussions relating to pragmatics always pop up, especially when we cover modals. It is a challenge, explaining that using "*please*" + modal does not often cut it with requests, and "*should*" does not always cut it with suggestions" (Addie, 2007). This comment highlights the teacher's awareness that, in some situations, lexical mitigation is sufficient, but that other situations may require more complex syntactic mitigation.[3] Some additional pragmatics topics that our participants mentioned covering in their classes include: hedging, conversational turn-taking, and different cultural communication styles (e.g., Japanese versus American).

Several participants discussed ways in which they used email in activities to address pragmatics with their students. Incorporating the instruction of modals into an email activity for an advanced level writing class, one teacher wrote, "I used the different versions of the emails to teach the use of modal verbs (e.g., differences between "*could*" and "*was not able to*", etc.) and tones of writing (more intrusive or more subtle)" (Li, 2007). Using a similar activity but with the speech act of advice, another participant discussed a "modal email project" that she had her students complete "where they emailed a friend for advice and emailed a professor for advice" (Kristin, 2008). Presumably the project fostered ESL students' awareness of how to choose the language that is most appropriate to different addressees. Through such an activity, teachers can demonstrate how language choices depend on contextual variables such as social distance or relative social power. In addition, some participants reported using email in another way. A few teachers shared the ways in which they use the emails they receive from students as opportunities for extra pragmatics instruction. For instance, a more experienced teacher wrote, "I have also included mini-pragmatic lessons into e-mails that I receive from students. I tell them how to address the teacher properly, how to make requests, how to ask for recommendation letters, etc." (Denise, 2007). As these examples suggest, email not only serves a communicative function but it can also be utilized as an authentic text forming the foundation of a planned activity, or as a tool for more spontaneous pragmatic instruction outside of the classroom.

Role plays were a commonly noted activity used by our participants to introduce their language students to speech acts as well as to various politeness strategies. One participant explained how she used role plays to introduce speech acts: "When I teach speech acts I give them the formal and informal situations and give them situations to use [politeness strategies] and situations to not use them and have them role play in class" (Kristin, 2008). Another teacher recalled a specific role play activity she did with her students that focused on the use of a particular formulaic structure:

> I remember I had my students (at that time I was teaching two low-intermediate ESL classes at the [IEP]) perform a short plot that they created which included the use of structures such as "*Do you mind if . . .*" I remember even though they had studied this structure in class before their performance, in the spontaneous and quick language exchange during the performance, most students (I remember especially Asian students) still responded by nodding or

> saying "*yes*" to this structure even though their intention was "*no, I don't mind at all*". (Li, 2007)

Three participants mentioned that they have used, or plan to use, modified versions of their teaching modules they completed as the final project in the course. In addition to the German-American intercultural pragmatics workshop that we mentioned earlier, another participant developed an "apologies maze"[4] as a part of her teaching module and was able to use it in courses she taught in an EFL university setting (Lilly, 2006). And yet another plans to use her final course project to teach her future students about humor and joketelling in Spanish (Michelle, 2009). These examples illustrate the practical repurposing of classroom assignments (which participants completed during their Master's degree studies) into ready-made materials that they can now, as teachers, use in their language classrooms.

In addition to these most frequently mentioned topics and activities, a few other methods were mentioned by our participants. One participant, who taught Business English in an ESL setting, introduced intercultural communication to students by having them deliver presentations on business etiquette. Describing this activity further, she explained that it "included how to address people from different countries in business meetings, how to greet them, and how to say goodbye" (Manuela, 2008). Some participants also used movies and *YouTube* clips in the classroom as audiovisual tools for pragmatic instruction. These visual methods were used as models to demonstrate to learners how native speakers interact in a variety of situations. Additionally, our participants utilized other instructional methods, such as a students-as-ethnographers approach, metalinguistic explanation, and error correction, to address pragmatics with their students.

A final topic that was mentioned by a few participants teaching ESL at the university level was that the pragmatics topics they taught often centered around students' immediate needs or situations in an academic environment. One teacher wrote: "Most of what I teach is student-teacher interaction, but other than that, they don't get anything. How their pragmatic competence is in other contexts, I would not know" (Denise, 2007). Another teacher who shared this focus on "pragmatics for academic purposes" added that she thought it would also be helpful to provide instruction on "extra-curricular topics," such as how to make friends with native speakers, as well as social norms for situations like parties, or other social gatherings.

Although more than half of our participants shared some of the ways in which they were able to incorporate pragmatics into the courses they have taught, not all of our participants have been able to address pragmatics topics with their students for various reasons. We now turn to a discussion of the some of the challenges and obstacles they face.

Constraints

The major obstacle reported by our participants with respect to incorporating pragmatics into their teaching was curricular constraints. Six teachers who were teaching in university EAP contexts referred to curricular constraints in various ways. One teacher indicated that although she clearly identified pragmatics as an area where the ESL students would benefit from more instruction, she felt restricted by the program's curriculum: "I wish the curriculum

allowed more time for pragmatic issues because there is so much that students need" (Kristin, 2008). Interestingly, a number of the teachers who indicated that they *did* incorporate pragmatics into their teaching were the same participants who mentioned curricular constraints—and explained that they felt they could have been doing more with pragmatics if they were not so bound by the program's curriculum. For example, one student wrote, "The courses I've taught since [the MA program] run the gamut, and in some of them, I've worked in [pragmatics] here and there, while in others, I just haven't addressed it at all. I think one of the constraints is the challenge of getting through all the academic skills, projects, and content, [which] an existing course guide controls" (Krista, 2006). Another teacher from the same program agreed, "I think sometimes pragmatics gets lost in other required objectives of the courses I teach" (Nirojah, 2009). Curricular constraints were also mentioned by another participant who worked as a graduate teaching assistant in the university's Spanish program. Because this student had to follow the same syllabus as all other Spanish TAs in the program, she found that her Spanish students' main concern was with passing the course's exams and quizzes—leaving her with few, if any, opportunities to introduce pragmatics.

In yet another context, two of the teachers who worked in K-12 settings indicated that they did not have a chance to incorporate pragmatics at all into their teaching. One of these teachers explained that "The first year I taught middle school ESL language arts/reading, [I] did not incorporate pragmatics. Thinking back, the reason for this may have been the pressure of other things that I needed to teach them that year…. possibly some backwash effect of standardized testing as well" (Lilly, 2006). Another participant, currently in an education doctoral program, compared the extent of the pragmatics instruction he received during his Master's program, to the K-12 teacher preparation courses he is currently teaching. Specifically, he has observed that there is very little instruction about pragmatics in K-12 teacher preparation. He noted that "In K-12 teacher education, pragmatics is generally (very generally) 'covered' in the first of two ESOL courses as a linguistic construct. There is a greater focus on morphology, syntax, and phonology" (Carter, 2005). This observation reveals not only the curricular restraints faced by this participant, but also brings to light a potential opportunity for some K-12 teacher preparation programs to consider (if they are not doing so already) placing more emphasis on pragmatics.

Additionally, several participants who had a considerable amount of prior language teaching experience noted that a major obstacle to teaching pragmatics is that it is not adequately covered in language textbooks. And although there is some evidence (Jiang, 2006; Vellenga, 2004) to suggest that more recent ESL/EFL textbooks are addressing pragmatics to a greater extent than they did in the past, it is clear that this remains an area where more work is still needed. As one participant, who is now a faculty member responsible for training a new generation of foreign language teachers, explains:

> As a 20-year veteran language educator, I see a lot of problems with the foreign language textbooks that are available on the post secondary market in the United States. One major problem is that the written discourse in the texts and the spoken discourse in the accompanying videos are very contrived and not at all authentic. The textbook authors tend to fine tune the speech so that

> learners are only exposed to vocabulary and structures that appear in the lesson. I did a mini analysis comparing a few dialogues that appeared in the beginning Spanish textbook that is used at [name of university] with some authentic dialogues that are available on LangMedia archive, a searchable collection of video clips of native speakers performing everyday actions in various countries where the target language is spoken. I found that the authentic dialogues were over twice as long as those in the textbook and that the authentic dialogues contained a greater variety of vocabulary and structures compared to the textbook dialogues. In essence, my findings mirrored those of the article that we read in class [i.e., Gilmore, 2004]. (Victoria, 2007)

The issue about what is—or is not—included in textbooks is particularly relevant in light of the above comments made by teachers in programs which expect them to closely follow a text that has been determined by a program-wide syllabus, or curriculum. This may also be an issue for novice teachers who have not yet developed an extensive repertoire of teaching ideas and resources, and who may rely on a textbook to a greater extent than perhaps their more experienced counterparts.

However, even experienced language teachers may find the integration of pragmatics into the ESL courses to be challenging. In the following excerpt, a very experienced teacher of English indicates that although the course equipped her with a greater awareness of interlanguage pragmatics (which enabled her to subsequently deal with individual students in specific situations), she nevertheless felt daunted by incorporating pragmatics into the class in a broader way.

> I am now much more aware of pragmatic lapses in my students, and can analyze what is wrong and why, but I have not taken any systematic steps to help them beyond ad hoc correction and explanation. Part of this stems from the kinds of classes I have taught since doing the class but also from the fact that it is such a huge issue, I don't know where to begin. Some of the emails the students send me are very, very pragmatically flawed, but I haven't yet taken the time and energy to design materials and activities to address this. Next semester I am teaching "Grammar" at level 5 […]. Maybe I can incorporate some specifically pragmatics-orientated activities in that course. I know that I really should. (Jane, 2007)

Once again, the lack of appropriate teaching materials for pragmatics—and the concomitant time and effort that it would take to develop such materials—underlies what this teacher perceives to be an obstacle in doing so. It is noteworthy that this teacher's comment, like some others above, indicates that she, too, has identified pragmatics as a very real need that her ESL students have. The challenge for her lies in how to best address it in her classes.

Finally, one of the EAP teachers mentioned an interesting episode of resistance from one of her students. Although this represented an anomalous situation in our data, we include it here because we believe that it raises some important caveats related to introducing pragmatics into the language classroom. The teacher summarized her experience in the following excerpt:

> Although some classes have been very receptive to the notion of pragmatics, others have not. For example, one student once commented after a discussion of pragmatics in making requests that teachers should not assume that students are impolite, and that "politeness" is the type of information they can discover on their own. Of course, to be fair, this probably has much to do with the fact that I am still learning how to approach the integration of pragmatics into skill and content-based English classes, as it does with students' notions of what language learning does and does not encompass. Regardless, it was infinitely helpful and eye-opening for me to think about language learning on this level, as it has been for many of my students and I remain quite invested in the idea of teaching pragmatics at every level. (Addie, 2007)

The quotation from this particular participant addresses the vast complexity of factors that confronts beginning teachers in the classroom: integrating various domains of knowledge into a single course, clarifying and negotiating course objectives with students, responding to student concerns, and so forth. It also serves to illustrate the expression of agency and subjectivity of individual language learners, who may feel that learning about sociopragmatic norms that differ from those of their L1 somehow poses a threat to their identity, or represents an attempt to change who they are. This issue has been addressed by Ishihara (2006) and Ishihara and Tarone (2009), who make the important distinction between receptive and productive pragmatic competence. That is, even if learners choose not to produce native-like language and behave in a native-like manner, it is important for them to learn to recognize and understand intentions, nuances, politeness, rudeness in others' linguistic production. On this issue, we share the conviction with scholars such as these that when it comes to pragmatics in the L2 classroom, we must provide language learners with multiple linguistic tools and resources in the L2, but we must respect the choices individual learners ultimately make—whether those choices involve adopting the sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic norms of the target language, or whether they involve actively resisting those norms.

Other Learning Outcomes

Most typically, when the notion of "awareness raising" is discussed in the Contrastive Analysis/Cross-Cultural Pragmatics class, it has to do with how to raise awareness in language *learners* – referring to general awareness about cultural differences, and more specifically, an awareness that individuals from different ethnolinguistic backgrounds may have different ways of "doing things with words" than is the case in one's own linguaculture. For example, Eslami-Rasekh's (2005) article, "Raising the pragmatic awareness of language learners," is often used in class as a springboard for discussing how to make language learners aware of such cultural differences.

In their questionnaire responses, several participants explained that they had personalized this process of awareness raising, by becoming more aware of the possibility that what might have been construed as rudeness on the part of their ESL students could instead be a case of pragmatic failure. As one participant noted, "I think another significant way that this class has been useful in my teaching is to raise aware[ness] of cross-cultural issues and specific areas of conflict that allow me to avoid getting offended or frustrated personally by certain

student interactions" (Eric, 2008). Another participant described how her greater awareness allowed her to resolve a specific issue with a student that arose as an email misunderstanding: "I talked with a student this semester who had sent me a rude email (unintentionally) where…the grammar mistakes made the email very rude. I addressed it and…I was happy that I talked with him…and I'm happy that I learned to step back and find out why the situation went wrong and to not assume the student is being rude" (Kristin, 2008).

Whereas these two examples speak to teachers' awareness of the potential for pragmatic failure to be mistaken for rudeness in their interpersonal interactions, another participant's narrative poignantly reveals how raising other students' awareness critically depends on the teacher's *own* awareness:

> While teaching last summer in the summer intensive program, I had a very young student (14) from Kazakhstan whose L1 was Russian and whose [English proficiency] was mid-range. That said, the student was widely perceived as "curt," if not rude, by the other students and myself. Before assuming that the student was indeed rude, my study of pragmatics led me to consider the potential underlying factors behind his manner of speech. I was, therefore, more open to dealing with the student and encouraged the others in the class (all slightly older) to do so as well.… The added attention I paid to those underlying factors—and this was a definite result of my having studied pragmatics—helped improve the situation for everyone in the class. Thus, even an awareness of pragmatics proved itself a worthy tool in the classroom. (Jim, 2008)

Beyond "raised awareness" in interactions between themselves and their students, one of the more unanticipated outcomes of our study was the number of participants who shared comments about how the course had made them aware of their own interactions in other contexts: with friends, partners or spouses, family members, people they came into contact with at work, etc. One participant, a native speaker of English, wrote "Honestly I felt like social interactions made so much more sense to me after I took this class" (Nirojah, 2009). Another student remembered that the course had enabled her to realize "something very enlightening about my then, now former, relationship—our conversation styles were very incompatible and that kind of misunderstanding often led to arguments" (Krista, 2006). And yet another student indicated how that the course raised her awareness of pragmatics in her multiple roles: as language learner, as language teacher, and even as a mother. Writing from the perspective of a language learner, she explained,

> I understood from personal experience how the transfer of L1 sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic knowledge when using an L2 can be awkward, particularly in the case of Arabic to English linguistic speech act realization or structure, since we have such contrastingly different cultural attitudes about references to God, and about the concepts of honesty and directness, fate, time and commitment. I have witnessed how lack of pragmatic competence is interpreted as offensive or rude from both cultural perspectives. (Robin, 2008)

She added that she intended to use this personal experience as a learner of Arabic to help inform her teaching of English: "This is something I hope to be able to use to my advantage in my teaching at some point in order to promote awareness and understanding about the varying conventions." The same participant reflected on how her own communicative style may have implications in encounters with her future ESL students: "The discussion about differences in communicative styles prompted me to consider how my communicative style might be perceived, particularly in my dealings with students." She also indicated the class discussion of communicative style had enabled to her reflect on her interactions with her children in a new light: "I sometimes feel my teenage and young adult children and I are not speaking the same language because they so often misconstrue and misinterpret meanings of things that I've said and vice versa."

Another dominant theme that we identified in our data was that the assignments and texts that often made the strongest impression on students were those that were in some way "authentic," or that explained something about how pragmatics operates in the "real world" (i.e., in non-educational contexts). For example, many students remembered the email analysis activity, which asked them to analyze an authentic email exchange (and case of miscommunication) between Japanese and American business people. As one student pointed out, "The analysis brought to light how the lack of pragmatic knowledge can lead to communication breakdown" (Robin, 2008). Another student explained that the reason why this assignment made the most impact on her was "because it was applied to a real situation that we could very easily encounter" (Michelle, 2005). And another student added that this assignment underscored that pragmatics is not just something to be considered in the context of speaking and listening: "the email assignment also made me aware of just what a minefield written pragmatics is for NNS—especially for those who don't have flexibility in their language. I had considered it much more of an oral phenomenon". (Jane, 2007).

In addition to the email analysis assignment, a classic chapter by Gumperz (1982) was a reading that also made a very strong impression on a number of participants. This text describes a miscommunication between South Asian workers and their British counterparts (due, in part, to differences in meanings associated with certain patterns of intonation). As one participant explained, "this pragmatic snafu nearly cost the workers their jobs, and as it was rectified via a bit of linguistic/pragmatic intervention, I realized the 'real world' import of an understanding of pragmatics. That made quite an impression" (Jim, 2008). Another student agreed, noting that this particular reading "really stuck with me" (Eric, 2008).

As for other memorable texts and assignments, we observed that students mentioned one particular text more than any other, and that this happened to be an audio-visual text, namely Deborah Tannen's video "That's Not What I Meant." This video is shown to students at the beginning of the semester, to introduce them to basic concepts such as features of conversational style, linguistic politeness, and speech acts. Interestingly, this video is always shown on the very first day of class, so we were surprised that so many students mentioned this particular text as opposed to other ones (including other videos) that they encountered later in the semester. One participant recalled from the video the notion that "pragmatic misunderstandings occur when people with different speech styles try to communicate. For

instance, there are those that expect long pauses between conversational turns and there are those that expect turns to overlap" (Robin, 2009). Another participant explained that the reason why this particular video made an impact on her was because it gave her some insight into an interpersonal relationship with a friend "The Tannen video made a huge impression on me and explained why a friend of mine became so frustrated at what I thought were my active listening strategies" (Jane, 2007).

Ten participants indicated that their final projects for the course were especially meaningful for them. As mentioned in an earlier section, for their final course projects, students are given the choice between developing research-informed instructional materials or conducting a small-scale research study. One student recalled that, when designing her instructional unit on the speech act of apologizing, "I did a lot of research and it definitely raised my awareness of how often English speakers apologize and the social functions that apologies serve" (Kristin, 2008). Another participant created an instructional unit on suggestions and recalled that she based the structure of her lessons on a recommendation from the research literature (i.e., Martinez-Flor & Uso-Juan, 2006): "From my final project I remember the recommended steps to teach speech acts: raising awareness, explicit instruction, controlled practice of speech acts and free practice. I also had the chance to implement a set of lessons I designed for my project in the [IEP]" (Manuela, 2008).

Several participants discussed the general benefits of learning more about research as a result of conducting research for their final projects for the course. One participant who chose the research option carried out an analysis of pragmatics coverage in textbooks used by the university's intensive English program. She indicated that she learned both about speech acts as well as about the process of conducting research: "This was one of my first actual research projects and I learned a lot from it. I learned more about speech acts themselves, I learned about the discipline and rigor involved in gathering data, and I learned how to go about analyzing data" (Amy, 2006). Another participant's experience with research was similarly revelatory: "Doing the research project is what I remember most. One thing learned is that designing a questionnaire is not that easy—the questions can't be ambiguous or the results won't be worth much. Yet, some questions must allow for a little flexibility since not everything can fit in one of 3 boxes. I also learned a lot about statistical analysis, putting the numbers together, etc. I'm glad I did it" (Donna, 2006). It is also worth noting that, to date, approximately half of the students who have taken this course have presented their final projects at a variety of professional venues (14 at our department's Graduate Student Colloquium, 5 at international conferences, 3 at regional conferences; additionally, 1 student's class paper was published in a TESOL newsletter, and 2 students have had their class papers published in international journals of education). One student noted that presenting her final course project at our department's annual Graduate Student Colloquium was a personal highlight in her graduate education experience.

Finally, another activity that several participants recalled as making a contribution to their learning was an in-class activity using the Michigan Corpus of Spoken Academic English (MICASE). One participant indicated that this was her first exposure to using a language corpus for pedagogical and research purposes: "The corpus was interesting because I had

never known it existed and it was such a great research tool" (Addie, 2007). Another pair of students recalled that searching for pragmatic data in a corpus can provide an empirical approach to confirming (or disconfirming!) native-speakers' intuitions about language use. One recalled that the "corpus (MICASE) can help because we learned that native speakers are not good judges of how the language is used and it is hard for us to see our own language critically" (Krista, 2006); while the other recalled, more specifically, that her own "assumptions about the way language is used were not borne out by the MICASE corpus" (Jane, 2007).

Conclusions and Implications

In analyzing the data generated by our participants, we discovered that what seems to have "worked" especially well for former students in the course were readings and assignments that underscored the importance of pragmatics in real-world contexts—even beyond the language classroom. From their comments, we have learned that the assignments involving authentic intercultural data (as well as readings that present instances of intercultural miscommunication outside the classroom) helped many participants understand that the course topics represented more than just decontextualized academic content. Rather, these tasks led to an understanding of the real-world implications for the language learners that they teach. In particular, these texts and activities helped illustrate, in powerful ways, how pragmatic failure can have concrete and serious real-world repercussions.

We were also intrigued that while some aspects of the course were mentioned by several participants, others were only mentioned by one or two participants. This reinforces our personal conviction that exposing students to a wide variety of topics, readings, activities, etc. is crucial to reach the widest number of MA-TESL students. No two students are identical, and something that "speaks to" one student may not interest another student; similarly, something from the course that "sticks with" one individual may be quickly forgotten by another. Because one of the videos from the course was recalled by more participants than any of the written texts, this suggests that presenting information in a variety of formats and media may also be useful in reaching the maximum number of students.

Furthermore, we learned that students viewed their final projects for this course as an opportunity for professional development. In some cases, this professional development expressed itself in the creation of innovative, research-informed, pragmatics teaching materials, which some participants had the opportunity to test out in their own language classes. In other cases, students were able to learn more about pragmatics and research by engaging in actual pragmatics-related research themselves. In both cases, many students extended the impact of their projects beyond the confines of the classroom, and shared their work with wider audiences at local, national, and international venues.

We were also pleasantly surprised to read so many participants' examples of raised awareness. A number of participants mentioned specific instances where this awareness of culturally different ways of communicating ameliorated potentially tense or awkward situations with their students, or in their classes. In addition, other participants made interesting comments about how the course stimulated awareness of their own culturally-

informed ways of communicating as well as the understanding of how those ways of communicating can impact other areas of their lives that extend well beyond their professional identities as language teachers.

Of course, our most promising finding was that so many participants indicated that they had been able to take something that they learned about pragmatics and apply in to their language teaching experience. The most common topics addressed in their language classes include speech acts (such as requests, apologies, etc.) and various politeness strategies, such as modal verbs. A number of participants drew on their knowledge of pragmatics in teaching their students about communicating appropriately via email. Role plays, video clips, as well as more explicit methods, such as metalinguistic explanation, were mentioned as common types of activities used to teach learners about pragmatics. While some of our participants made pragmatics part of their lessons, the majority instead seemed to address pragmatics "as it came up" with their students. Although many of our participants were able to somehow bring pragmatics into their language teaching, several still mentioned a number of challenges they faced. In other words, even though they identified pragmatics as a need that their ESL students had, they were not always able to adequately address those needs. In this respect, curricular constraints represented the primary challenge, followed by lack of suitable and relevant instructional materials.

Although our findings offer some interesting insights from this group of participants, we are also well aware of the limitations of our study. We acknowledge that our participants' incorporation of pragmatics into their subsequent language teaching is no doubt attributable to numerous factors beyond simply just having taken this course—factors such as participants' own interest, motivation, opportunities, and teaching contexts. Our study is descriptive in nature, and therefore, in no way suggests a causal relationship between the course and participants' subsequent actions. However, in many cases, participants' own comments reflect their beliefs that the course played at least *some* role in what they decided to teach and how. Moreover, we are aware that our study consists of responses from a sample of participants from only one MA-TESL program. Nevertheless, we were encouraged that many former students from our MA-TESL did respond to our request for information (i.e., approximately 50% of those who had taken the course over the past five years). We were also pleased that our participants included representatives from five different cohorts of students. Also, in terms of demographic categories such as age, gender, L1, country of origin, language teaching experience, we believe that our sample is a rather accurate reflection of the population from which it was drawn. Nevertheless, it is obvious that further research from students in other programs would help determine if any of the trends and tendencies discussed here may apply to MA-TESL students and graduates in other contexts. Similarly, Ishihara (2010) has made the point that far more research on instructional pragmatics with respect to language teacher education programs is needed.

In conclusion, we distill the following observations and suggestions from our own study for other TESL educators. 1) Although not all have been able to do so, the majority of our teacher participants discussed various ways in which they have been able to address pragmatics in their own language teaching. Thus, our study suggests that it is possible to

teach prospective and practicing ESL/EFL teachers about pragmatics, and to equip them with some tools and techniques for addressing pragmatics in their language classrooms. It is also worth pointing out that our teacher participants have themselves come to recognize that developing their learners' overall linguistic competence in the L2 does include addressing their L2 pragmatic competence. 2) As language teacher educators, we cannot assume that knowledge about pragmatics (content knowledge) and knowing *how* to teach pragmatics (pedagogical knowledge) is something that language teachers will automatically discover on their own. Some of the most experienced teachers in our sample indicated that—even though they had received some formal training in this area, and even though they recognized their learners would benefit from pragmatics instruction—they still found it a challenge to incorporate pragmatics into their classes in a pre-planned fashion. This discovery underscores the need for MA-TESL programs to continue to support developing teachers' knowledge bases in this area. 3) The implications of teaching language teachers about pragmatics may extend well beyond their L2 classrooms. Emphasizing the "real world" relevance and implications of pragmatic competence (as well as pragmatic failure!) is important. And knowledge acquired in this area may extend to other domains of teachers' lives as well, impacting how they perceive and come to understand their interactions with others. In this respect, we believe that a little bit of awareness-raising goes a long way. 4) Finally, the greatest obstacle seems to be navigating within program or curricular constraints. Future instructional efforts may need to focus on helping our MA-TESL students to consider creative ways of incorporating pragmatics into existing curricula: in other words, working *within* curricular constraints, and figuring out how to address pragmatics in a wider variety of language courses.

Notes

[1] We speculate here that perhaps one of the factors related to this state of affairs was the dearth of available materials on pragmatics aimed an audience of prospective or practicing teachers. Only recently has the field seen an increase in the number of such publications. These include: LoCastro (2003), Ishihara and Cohen (2010), Tatsuki and Houck (2010), and O'Keeffe, Adolphs and Clancy (2011).

[2] Since graduating from our program, this participant conducts the workshop at the German university where she works, as part of the pre-departure orientation for exchange students coming to study in the U.S.

[3] Some studies (e.g., Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007) have observed a similar phenomenon: i.e., that language learners tend to rely much more on lexical strategies (e.g., "*Could you please lend me your notes"*) – as opposed to syntactic strategies (e.g., "*I would appreciate it if you could lend me your notes*"*)* – in the mitigation of face-threatening speech acts.

[4] The "apologies maze" is an interactive PowerPoint activity developed by this participant for learners to apply their pragmatic knowledge about apologizing in English. While working through various scenarios, learners choose apologies they consider to be pragmatically appropriate; feedback is provided about why some choices are more or less appropriate.

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Appendix

Course Reading List

Bardovi-Harlig, K., & Hartford, B.S. (1993). Learning the rules of academic talk: A longitudinal study of pragmatic change. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 15*, 279-304.

Biesenbach-Lucas, S. (2007). Students writing email to faculty: An examination of e-politeness among native and non-native speakers of English. *Language Learning & Technology, 11* (2), 59-81.

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