

# Pragmatics Matters



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# From the Guest Editor

Dear all,

My name is Kathleen Kitao, and I am the guest editor for this edition of Pragmatics Matters. I first became interested in pragmatics when I took a class in the subject at TESOL Summer Institute at Oregon State University more than 35 years ago. With my late husband Kenji Kitao, I did research on requests. Later, I studied refusals, and in recent years, I have applied corpus methods to studying apologies. In addition, I have co-authored a textbook teaching about speech acts, taught courses on pragmatics theory, and supervised graduate students doing pragmatics-related research. As a teacher of English and as a user of English, Japanese, and American Sign Language, I have come to see how important pragmatics is to communication in our daily lives. I hope that you, as a teacher and user of languages, will find this issue of Pragmatics Matters helpful.

First of all, I would like to express my appreciation to the contributors, who took time out of their busy schedules to write papers, reports, etc.

This issue includes several short articles on a variety of aspects of pragmatics. Adriana Mendes Porcellato discussed how a teacher can use narratives to promote intercultural awareness. Kathleen Kitao contributed an article discussing how apology strategies can be taught using a data-driven approach. Hitomi Abe reported on a study about using pragmatics-related experiences to motivate EFL students. David Clayton wrote an article about teaching polite requests.

In addition, we have reports on presentations of the Pragmatics SIG's Zoom talks from Ian Nakamura on Sanae Oda-Sheehan's presentation on her autoethnographic study of pragmatics in real life and in the classroom, and from Linda K. Kadota on Rob Olson's presentation on Zoom activities.

Finally, based on presentations from the PanSIG conference, there are reports by Kathleen Kitao on Chie Kawashima's presentation analyzing practice tasks for teaching speech acts and by Yaoko Matsuoka on Yukie Saito's presentation on "Possibility and Challenge of Online Language Exchanges." In addition, Roger Ferrari wrote a report on Lala Tanaka's presentation, "Chat-Style Writing in Teaching Conversation," and Kathleen Kitao wrote a report on Rob Olson's poster session on how to deal with students' use of loan words in Japanese as English words. Finally, Todd J. Allen reported on the forum "International PhDs about Pragmatics in Progress". With these reports, readers can get a good idea of the pragmatics-related presentations at PanSIG 2021.

Looking into the future, we will be accepting contributions for our next edition of the newsletter. If you have an idea for an activity to teach an element of pragmatics, an aspect of pragmatics you'd like to share, a pragmatics event you'd be interested in reporting on, etc., please email Donna Fujimoto at [fujimotodonna@gmail.com](mailto:fujimotodonna@gmail.com).

Finally, I'd like to thank Donna Fujimoto for the opportunity to act as guest editor of Pragmatics Matters and for her support and help in doing so, and Todd J. Allen for putting the newsletter together in the interactive format as well as the final proofreading.

Kathleen Kitao  
Guest Editor





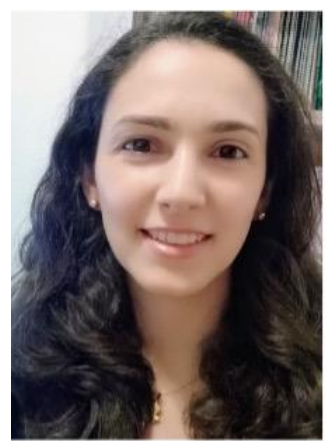


# Research Articles





# Promoting intercultural awareness through a teacher's narrative



## Introduction

As a Ph.D. candidate, I had the opportunity to attend courses on Pragmatics in my university in Brazil. However, as it often happens in graduate school, the courses were mostly dedicated to theory and I felt they lacked more practical ideas that could directly inform my teaching practice (Vasquez & Fioramonte, 2011). This is one of the reasons that motivated me to enroll in the Summer Institute "Language and Culture in Sync: Teaching Linguistic Politeness and Intercultural Awareness," promoted by CARLA (University of Minnesota) and taught by Professor Ishihara.

The course, which offered the more practical grip on Pragmatics that I was looking for, gave me the opportunity to design pragmatic-based activities and lesson plans for my future classes. In this article, I will share one such activity that I elaborated on in order to raise language learners' metapragmatic awareness and promote a critical understanding of intercultural and cross-cultural pragmatics. After describing the activity, I will draw some reflections on how the process of creating it helped me make sense of my own intercultural experiences, analysing them from a pedagogical and more critical perspective.

## The Summer Institute (Theoretical background)

The first classes of the Summer Institute were dedicated to essential aspects of pragmatics, with particular emphasis on the concept of pragmatic variation and the role of context in shaping and determining what is adequate. Context, as we know, is a very abstract concept that has been made more operational by focusing on macrosocial aspects, such as power, distance and degree of imposition (Brown & Levinson, 1987) and microsocial variables, such as age, gender, and regional variation, among others (Schneider & Barron, 2008).

## By Adriana Mendes Porcellato

In the first week of the summer institute, it was particularly interesting to see how these variables related to stereotyping in complex ways which I had never considered before. From the readings and course discussions, it emerged that a superficial view of pragmatic differences between cultures may give rise to common stereotypes, such as "Brazilians are always late" or "Japanese are always punctual" (Kumaravadivelu, 2003; Ishihara, in press). However, being aware of pragmatic variation is what helps us make sense of differences inside a community of speech, proving that generalizations can be dangerously inaccurate. In other words, it is a deeper awareness of pragmatic variation that makes us see that the general assumption that "Brazilians are always late" is flawed because, though in many regions in Brazil it is perfectly fine to be more than one hour late for a party, punctuality is valued in other contexts, such as for business meetings.

## The activity

The activity I present below was elaborated after a lesson on the use of critical narratives in teaching pragmatics (Ishihara, 2012; Ishihara, in press). From the readings and discussions, it emerged that narratives can be both a powerful and risky tool to use in the foreign language classroom: on the one hand, they can motivate learners and help draw their attention to the real-life consequences of pragmatic failure (Judd, 1999); on the other hand, being based on anecdotal experience, they can contribute to the spreading of stereotypes. This is why Ishihara (2012) and Ishihara and Cohen (2021) advocate for a critical use of narratives in the language classroom, which consists in including them in activities that encourage students' critical reflection on the complexity of cultural differences.

The narrative, which I present below, was followed by questions aimed at raising students' awareness of pragmatic variation while cautioning them against stereotyping (Ishihara, 2012; Ishihara & Porcellato, in press).

### **Part 1: In Brazil**

When I first moved to Brazil, after living in Italy for almost fourteen years, greetings were a bit puzzling for me: I discovered people had a different notion of the parts of day (morning, afternoon, evening and night) and that “how are you’s” were not real questions that demanded an answer. Something else that I had to learn was how to greet family members and friends at social gatherings. Shortly after I had moved to Brazil, I was invited to a cousin’s birthday party at my aunt’s house. When we arrived, my aunt opened the door and she hugged me and kissed me on my left cheek and then on my right cheek, just as I had expected. At this point, as I was pulling back, I realized that she was going for a third kiss. There was a bit of an awkward split second, and then my aunt very good-humoredly told me: “It’s three in Brazil”. This explicit explanation made me notice the gap and I learned the lesson: three kisses.

After a while, at a gathering with other teenagers, I was very surprised to see that I was the only one going for the third kiss, while most of them just greeted one another with two kisses: wasn’t it three in Brazil? Apparently not, and I began to notice that people my age hardly ever kissed their peers three times. Was my aunt wrong? No, that was not the case either, as I had seen other, usually older, people exchanging three kisses.

Another thing that I began to notice among my peers and found as intriguing and uncomfortable was that, whenever I arrived at a small gathering, I was always supposed to kiss everyone on my arrival (even if it was 10-15 people) and kiss them all again when I was about to leave. As I wasn’t used to all this kissing, I remember feeling somewhat uncomfortable. However, with time, I got used to it, and I also understood that on some occasions you are expected to kiss (when meeting friends and family or meeting someone for the first time), but you are not necessarily expected to kiss people you see every day at work or your classmates at school or at your research group meetings.

Years later, I moved from Belo Horizonte (in the state of Minas Gerais, MG) to Sao Paulo (in the state of Sao Paulo, SP), the biggest metropolis in Brazil. As I met new people in this new city, I repeated the routine I was familiar with: a hug, a kiss on the left cheek and, as I was going for the second kiss, I noticed people were already pulling away: “it’s only one kiss and a hug in São Paulo!”, they told me. Falling into a common stereotype, my first thought was that urban “paulistanos” are not as warm as the more rural “mineiros” I was used to. However, to my surprise, I discovered that at every meeting of my new research group in Sao Paulo, I was expected to kiss everyone at my arrival and then again when I left, so there was still a lot of kissing and hugging going on, even in reasonably formal settings. Good thing I had grown more comfortable with it over time!

From this experience, I gathered that in Brazil people were much more comfortable kissing and hugging than in Italy, and I shared this thought with some Brazilian friends, including my boyfriend.

## Part 2: In Italy

A couple of years later, around Christmas, my boyfriend and I went to Italy and we paid a visit to my Italian side of the family. When we arrived there, I introduced him to my aunt, and they hugged and kissed twice. However, he was really surprised when my uncle also kissed him on the cheek, as men usually exchange only a handshake in Brazil. This was all the more puzzling if we consider that in Italy people usually start kissing others starting from the right cheek, which is just the opposite to what happens in Brazil. After dinner, my boyfriend told me that, considering I had described Italians as colder than Brazilians, he was not really prepared for what had happened. I hadn't really thought about warning him that greetings in Italy may involve kisses regardless of the genders involved, partly because, being a woman, this is something I didn't relate to as much and partly because I had never paid attention to this custom, which seemed just normal to me from an Italian perspective. Only by seeing my boyfriend go through this intercultural experience did I realize that the comparison I had drawn between Brazilian and Italian greetings was not really "fair" as it put the two cultures on different levels: while I was quick to see Brazilian greetings from an "outsider" perspective, I was somehow blind to the Italian greeting behaviour until someone pointed it out to me.

## Questions

- What do you say and do when you meet someone for the first time in your language/culture?
- How do you greet your family? How about your friends? And your co-workers?
- Do age and gender play a role in the way you greet people?
- Imagine a friend of yours is going to study at a Brazilian university for six months and intends to visit as much of the country as he can during his stay. What would you tell him about greetings?
- Look at the "map of the kisses" below and compare it with the narrative you read: can you see any inconsistencies?
- Are there regional differences in your country when it comes to pragmatics and culture? Do you think these differences are usually stereotyped in your culture (e.g. people from São Paulo are cold)? If they are, what do you think are (or could be) the consequences of these stereotypes?



Published by Ministério do Turismo on their Facebook page on April 3rd, 2017



## **Rationale**

From a personal perspective, I particularly enjoyed creating this activity as it gave me the opportunity to reflect on my own intercultural experiences. Although I had personally been through a considerable amount of pragmatic failures in Brazil, I found that most of my learning was not so easily retrievable, probably because I hardly ever reflected on it. What is more, as these events had happened in separate moments of my life, the connections between them had not been very evident. Only at the time of writing the narrative and reflecting on the incidents I went through, was I able to connect the dots in my own personal experience and to realize the role my boyfriend's perceptions played in my understanding of the cross-cultural differences between Italian and Brazilian greetings.

From a teaching perspective, I thought sharing this narrative and promoting discussion through follow-up questions would be an effective way to make students reflect on pragmatic variation, stereotypes, and ultimately on the complexity of learning various aspects of intercultural communication. If we consider pragmatic variation, the story exemplifies the important role of macrosocial and microsocial aspects, such as geographic region, age, gender and setting in Brazilian and Italian greeting behaviour. In the first three questions (a-c), students are asked to think about how they greet different people (friends, family, co-workers, people of the same or different gender and age) in their first language. These questions are meant to give learners the opportunity to become more aware of how context influences language and behaviour not only in the target language, but also in their mother tongue. Conversely, questions d and e address the complexity of cultural behavior. In question d, learners are asked to give advice to a university student who is going to study in Brazil for six months, which means they will have to consider the complexity of regional and gender variation in Brazilian greetings and therefore realize the drawbacks of simplistic generalizations. In the same way, in question e learners are prompted to study the “kisses map” (mapa do beijinho) and compare it to the narrative looking for inconsistencies. The idea is to make them realize that this map may seem to be a useful visual prompt to explain greeting behaviour in Brazil, but it is also a simplification of something that is actually far more complex. In fact, the map only accounts for a variable (namely, the regional one), but completely disregards other important factors, such as gender, age and setting (Ishihara & Porcellato, in press). Finally, question f tackles regional variety and stereotyping. This question refers to the part in the narrative where I rely on stereotypes to explain the behaviour of people from São Paulo, saying that they are “cold” because they live in a metropolis. Throughout the narrative, it emerges that this stereotypical assumption does not necessarily hold true. This question was aimed at raising learners' awareness of regional stereotypes in their own countries, which will contribute to a more in-depth analysis of inaccurate overgeneralizations not only in their L1 but also in their L2.

Although the activity I have just described refers to the Italian and Brazilian cultures, its use in the classroom does not have to necessarily be limited to Portuguese and Italian classes. In fact, the idea is to help students become more aware of cultural differences and intercultural relations, general concepts which learners of any language should be encouraged to reflect on.

## Conclusion

Narratives can be seen as a useful and powerful tool to tackle pragmatic variation in the classroom. However, when used uncritically, they may end up conveying anecdotal experiences or even contribute to the spreading of stereotypes, something we, as teachers, should strive to avoid (Ishihara & Porcellato, in press). It is, therefore, crucial that this tool be used in the classroom within an approach that encourages a critical analysis not only of the specific events and perspectives that are in the narrative, but also of important pragmatic concepts that are somehow evoked by it, such as context, variation and stereotypes.

I personally believe that, if used conscientiously, critical narratives can serve multiple purposes in the language classroom. Teachers can use them not only to raise learners' awareness of cultural differences but also to provide students with a critical framework to analyse complex issues such as pragmatic variation. In addition, a narrative can be a window through which learners can peek into a personal process (in this case, the teacher's process) of making sense of the complexities that lie within cultural differences. Last but not least, narratives can also help teachers reflect on their own intercultural experiences and, consequently, become more aware of them. While writing their narrative, educators need to analyse past experiences from a pedagogical perspective and are therefore encouraged to go deeper into them, looking for meaningful connections from a critical standpoint. This reflection helps teachers make sense of their intercultural experiences and transform them into teaching activities that are likely to engage students on many levels. For all these reasons, I conclude we shouldn't avoid using narratives in the classroom just because of their possible drawbacks, but we should actually exploit their potentialities for critical reflections both on the part of the learners and the teachers.

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Adriana Mendes Porcellato is an English and Italian teacher based in São Paulo, Brazil. She holds a PhD in Italian Language, Literature and Culture from Universidade de São Paulo (Brazil) and Università La Sapienza (Italy). She has investigated the role of pragmatics and culture in foreign language teaching, with a special focus on the analysis and development of pedagogical material.

Email address: [adriana.porcellato@outlook.com](mailto:adriana.porcellato@outlook.com)



# Using a Data-Driven Learning Approach to Teaching Apologies and Apology Responses

By S. Kathleen Kitao



Approaches to language teaching can be broadly categorized as deductive or inductive approaches. When using a deductive approach, which is the traditional way of teaching language, the teacher gives the students grammar rules, meanings of words, etc., and then the students do activities or exercises to apply what they have learned. In contrast, when using an inductive approach, the teacher provides examples of the grammar point or usage of the vocabulary words, and the students, often working together in pairs or groups, make generalizations based on the examples. The former is a teacher-centered approach, while the latter is a student-centered approach.

Inductive approaches allow more student participation and involvement. Students understand better and remember more, and using inductive approaches helps students develop autonomy. On the other hand, they do take longer, especially if the concepts are complex (Tian, 2005).

One inductive approach that has been developed is called data-driven learning (DDL). Johns and King (1991) describe DDL as “the use in the classroom of computer generated concordances to get students to explore the regularities of patterning in the target language, and the development of activities and exercises based on concordance output.” In DDL, the teacher makes use of corpora to find examples of lexical usage or grammatical points so that students can make generalizations about them, or, if the students are more advanced, have the students do the searches themselves. While DDL was originally developed as a way to study grammar and vocabulary, it has also been used to teach speech acts and socio-pragmatic guidelines.

Students use examples from a corpus to learn expressions related to the speech act, find patterns, and develop guidelines.

Because I had done studies of apologies and apology responses (Kitao, 2012; Kitao & Kitao, 2013) based on a corpus of subtitles from the American situation comedy *Modern Family* (Levitan & Lloyd, 2009), I decided to use the apologies I had identified to make a DDL-based exercise for my students in a linguistics pragmatics class. Because apologies have the advantage of being searchable in a corpus, they are an appropriate speech act to use for DDL. Most apologies can be found using lemmatized searches of five performative words: sorry, pardon, excuse, forgive, and apologize. In one study, using a corpus of downloaded subtitles from DVDs, lemmatized searches for the five keywords found 98% of the apologies in the corpus (Kitao, 2012)

## 2.1 Developing Materials

A corpus of DVD subtitles can be compiled by downloading the subtitles from DVDs using a program called SubRip (<http://www.videohelp.com/tools/Subrip>). This program creates srt files, which, if the srt extension is changed to txt, can be searched with concordancing software. The files include minutes and seconds indicating how far from the beginning each subtitle occurred, which can be useful in finding scenes. SubRip files are often posted online. A search for the title of a movie or television program and srt will find links to these files. Also, a large collection of srt files can be found at <http://www.tvsubtitles.net/>. You can compile the srt files for individual series episodes or movies into a text file. In addition, scripts can be found at such websites as Drew's Scripts-O-Rama Index at <http://www.script-o-rama.com/table.shtml>.



The choice of material is important. Huang (2004, p. 5) found that movies of the genre romance/comedy and dramas portrayed ups and downs in relationships that required apologies that reflect real life. Television comedies and dramas would have similar characteristics. In contrast, Huang found that science fiction and action movies concentrated more on action and had few apologies. Rose (2001) suggested that material used to teach speech acts be less than 15 years old and depict contemporary characters in real-life situations.

Depending on the type of class and its goals, the teacher can have students compile their own corpora and do the searches for themselves; do searches for themselves in corpora provided by the teacher; or provide examples from a corpus with explanations of the background, names of speakers, etc. If the focus of the class is corpus linguistics, one of the former two methods would be preferable; if the focus of the class is on language learning, speech acts, or linguistic pragmatics, the latter is preferable. If students search for themselves, they will need to look at the scenes on DVDs in order to understand what the context of the apology was, which character spoke each line, etc. A concordancer can be used to find the apologies (and certain other speech acts). A concordancer developed by Laurence Anthony can be downloaded at <http://www.antlab.sci.waseda.ac.jp/software.html>. When I developed a data-driven learning activity to teach apologies in a linguistic pragmatics course, I used a corpus of DVD subtitles that had been developed from the first three seasons (2009, 2010 and 2011) of the US situation comedy Modern Family (Leviton, 2009). I had compiled a list of apologies from the corpus for a study of apologies (Kitao and Kitao, 2013), and I chose 20 examples of apologies. In choosing the apologies, I considered the variety of expressions and strategies and also the ease of explaining the context briefly in a way that students could easily understand. I also included examples that could be used to make specific points, such as one that used “I’m sorry” to express sympathy rather than an apology, one that used the apology in an ironic way, and one that did not have an Illocutionary Force Indicating Device (IFID) such as “I’m sorry.”

Students were given information about the characters in the series and a list of twenty apology interactions, along with these instructions:

The following are examples of apologies from the US family situation comedy Modern Family. Read the conversations and answer the following questions.

1. What is the expression used for the actual apology? (For example, “I apologize”) Make a list of the common/useful expressions.
2. What other strategies are used in each conversation, that is, what else does the speaker try to do? (For example, if the speaker says, “I’ll buy you a new one,” after losing a borrowed book, they are offering to fix the situation.) Make a list of the strategies you find.

2.2 Examples

Below are two examples of the apologies and an explanation of the strategies involved.

1. Whitney, a woman 11-year-old Manny met online, has come to meet him, believing he is an adult. She is talking to Manny’s mother Gloria after learning he is only 11.

Whitney:	This is so humiliating. I am sorry.
Gloria:	It's okay.
Whitney:	He just seemed so mature online. How could I be so stupid?
Manny:	You're not stupid. "Stupid" is not following your heart and taking a chance on love.

Whitney expresses the emotion she is feeling (“This is so humiliating”), uses an IFID (“I am sorry”), explains why she made the mistake (“He seems so mature online”), and criticizes herself for making the mistake (“How could I be so stupid?”).

In addition, the teacher could ask about responses to apologies. For example, “That’s okay” is a common response to an apology, and Manny reassures and comforts Whitney in response to her self-criticism.

2. Phil talks with an acquaintance about a problem his wife Claire has.

Phil: But if she lets me help her, I can make her problem go away.

Woman: Oh! That is such a male thing to say.

Phil: Well, forgive me for being a man.

In this example, Phil uses an IFID (“Forgive me for...”) and explains what he is apologizing for (“...for being a man.”) In this case, students should recognize that the apology is being used ironically, since Phil has no control over the fact that he is a man.

### 2.3 Classroom Procedures

Students work together in pairs or groups to identify common expressions and strategies that were used in the examples, and then the teacher goes through the list with the students, helping them identify which expressions and strategies are used in each example. Sometimes prompting questions are useful. For instance, in the example above, the teacher could ask, “Why do you think Whitney says, ‘He just seemed so mature online’”? Obviously students describe the strategies in their own terms rather than using technical terms.

Depending on the purpose of the class, the teacher can follow up by introducing students to a typology of apology strategies, with a lecture on theoretical aspects of apologies, with a discussion of the problems related to compiling a corpus, etc.

### 3. Discussion

When using this activity in a small linguistic pragmatics class, I found that students could identify most of the strategies in the apologies, sometimes with some prompting questions. In an informal survey of the students, they indicated that they liked the approach. A typical student wrote, “I think this is an effective way. By doing the exercise before listening to explaining, we can consider deeply, and it is important, I think. If we knew points before exercising, we only think the way that the teacher told.” However, it does take more time than it would have to just go over the examples and explain them to the class.

A limit on the use of DDL for speech acts is that many speech acts are not easily searchable. However, it might be possible to use such speech acts as asking permission and expressing gratitude or, for speech acts like requests that are not searchable, to look through the transcripts. More research is necessary on the use of DDL to teach speech acts as well as an exploration of which speech acts would work well with this approach.





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S. Kathleen Kitao is a professor emeritus in the Department of English at Doshisha Women's College. Her research interests include linguistic pragmatics, corpus linguistics, nonverbal communication, and extensive reading. She is studying American Sign Language.  
kkitao217@yahoo.com

# Pragmatic experiences to motivate EFL students in the Japanese classroom



By Hitomi Abe

Attitudes and motivation are crucial factors in foreign language acquisition, and learners with positive attitudes and high motivation tend to achieve higher language proficiency than those with negative attitudes and low motivation (Gardner, 2007; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). Eshghinejad (2016) suggested that a positive attitude and high motivation among learners have the potential to facilitate the learning of a second language. When learners have positive attitudes towards learning English, they show their interest in the language and are willing to learn more even when they encounter obstacles. Therefore, it seems reasonable to assume that attitudes are an essential way to measure learners' motivation.

Previously, I administered surveys to students in two English communication classes that I taught to investigate attitude and motivation (Abe & O'Day, 2019). English was a required subject for this women's college in Kyoto, Japan, but the students were not English majors. Their English language proficiency was low-intermediate, and they were divided into two classes. Many of the students from one of the classes lacked enthusiasm for learning English and showed little or no interest in participating in the class. In fact, they seemed to endure English classes only to accumulate enough credits to graduate. The majority of students from the other class actively participated and earnestly attempted to learn English. As a result, the average overall test scores for the latter group were higher than the test scores for the other class. To investigate the difference in attitudes toward learning English, I focused on their feelings and opinions about English. I administered the survey to gain insight into identifying the existing motivational challenges students encounter, with the hope of gaining a more realistic perspective about the English language teaching situation in Japanese colleges. I would like to share my findings, so others might gain ideas and insights into how to tackle similar problems they may encounter in their own classrooms.

Because of this, I wanted to explore students' attitudes toward studying English. Participants were asked to answer questions about the following: (a) whether or not they enjoy studying English, (b) the extent to which they believe they will need to use English in the future, and (c) their ability to identify English language skills they want to improve. Participants from the two low-intermediate classes were classified into a lower motivated group (LMG:  $n = 35$ ) and a higher motivated group (HMG:  $n = 35$ ) based on the aforementioned descriptions of the two classes and my assessment of them. This study analyzed the differences between them. Since the participants had difficulty in writing their answers in English, they responded in Japanese to the three questions I wrote in English. These questions and their responses are written in English as follows:

### **Q1. Do you enjoy studying English?**

Participants in the HMG answered “Yes” to this question more often than the LMG (See table). The most common comment from the HMG participants was that understanding English was “happy” and “fun.” The second most common comment was English was “helpful.” They perceived English was helpful because they realized that the more they study English, the better they will develop their English ability. One participant explained as follows: “There are times when I want to give up studying English, but because I have a keen desire to master English, so I enjoy studying it.” Only nine of the LMG participants who answered “Yes” to the question about whether they enjoy studying English made positive comments. Even though some of the LMG participants who affirmatively answered, they qualified their answers by writing negative comments. For example, “Because it is not too bad compared with other subjects,” and “Yes, but I don’t like studying grammar.”

Out of the total, 36 participants who answered “No”, typical comments were as following: “English is difficult,” “I can’t understand English,” and “I’m not good at English.” It seemed that some participants from both groups felt grammar was especially difficult to understand.

Another LMG participant commented that “it takes a long time to understand grammar, and the pain of studying English is greater than the joy of using English.” In addition, two LMG participants reported the following: “I don’t feel my English skill improves,” “I am only interested in Japanese.” Another significant comment by a participant in the HMG was as follows: “I understand English is necessary in the future, but unless I myself feel English is necessary for what I want to do, I don’t feel studying English is enjoyable.” Interestingly, the HMG participants commented in detail regardless of answering “Yes” or “No.” For example, “Studying English produces tangible results, so it is useful,” and “I like studying English because I’m interested in English movies and foreign countries.” One participant from the HMG answered that she felt lucky to have good English teachers when she was a junior high and high school student. On the other hand, two participants from each of the groups made similar comments. They reported that they had trouble with English since they were junior high school students. As the previous HMG participant suggested, teachers play an important role in encouraging students to continue positively learning English for the future and the first step for how to study English is one of the keys to being good at English.

### **Q2. Do you think you need English in the future?**

Generally speaking, participants from both groups recognized the need for English in this changing world in which we live. For example, one wrote “Because of globalization, English is necessary.” Another wrote “English is the common language in the world.” In addition, they thought that English was useful for whatever job they might have in the future. For example, five participants emphasized when they look for their jobs, the TOEIC score is valued. Furthermore, some participants pointed out that parents, teachers, news, and newspapers always communicate this need. The findings of the question 2 reveal that participants realize the necessity of English, yet their attitude seems passive just the same.

### **Q3. Which language skills do you want to improve?**

Many participants from both classes placed the most importance of speaking ability (See table). They felt that speaking was most useful to communicate with other people. They were happy if they could express what they want to say in English. Some people commented that if they could speak English, it is cool. Other skills which they feel important were speaking and listening ability, and listening ability. Participants thought that listening and speaking abilities were two important elements for



English conversation. They frequently answered, “When I hear other person’s saying, then I say something. It is communication.” They thought that if they go abroad, these two skills would be most necessary. Participants who feel listening ability is important commented that if they cannot listen to what other people are saying, they can do nothing. Some participants wanted to listen to English movies and music.

*Table 1 Results of Questionnaire*

	Q1	Q2	Q3
<b>LMC</b>	Yes = 14	Yes = 35	Speaking = 18
	No = 21		Listening = 8
			Listening+Speaking = 8
			Four skills = 1
<b>HMC</b>	Yes = 20	Yes = 35	Speaking = 15
	No = 15		Listening=7
			Listening+Speaking = 9
			Listening+Reading = 2
			Listening+Speaking+Reading = 1
			Listening+Reading+Writing = 1

Through the participants’ comments of this research, I found that when students have fun, feel English is useful for them, and see results, they develop a positive attitude toward studying English. This is in line with Sayadiand and Lashkarian’s (2010) findings: Learners need to feel, at the end of each lesson, that they have learned something useful, which they can use right away. Participants’ comments also suggested that needing to study grammar caused them stress, which resulted in feelings of inadequacy when studying English, yet the participants really want to improve their English speaking ability. It is clear that Japanese EFL learners, who rarely have the opportunity to use L2 outside of the classroom because they live in Japan, need to be given as many opportunities as possible to practice, so they can feel they can effectively use English. Furthermore, using enjoyable classroom activities can help them to overcome their feelings of inadequacy.

An understanding of an effective teaching approach that raises students’ awareness of pragmatics and speech acts in English class can address this problem. Textbooks play an important role in most English classes; however, they don’t include sufficient pragmatic information to help students communicate appropriately (Suezawa and Abe, 2012; Siegel, 2016). Cohen (2016) proposed classroom activities that can be helpful in teaching the target language pragmatics in foreign language situations, such as: (a) viewing segments from films, watching videos and analyzing them, (b) doing role plays, with the suggestion that they be based on models from film segments and videos, and (c) engaging in small-group discussions of the target language pragmatics, etc.

Hilliard (2017) also proposed 12 activities teachers can incorporate into their classroom to help develop students’ pragmatic competence, such as discussions, giving examples of speech acts in the target language, discourse completion tasks, and role plays. This study emphasized the importance of instruction that focuses on separate speech acts, activities that raise students’ pragmatic awareness through discussion and comparison with the L1, and activities that allow students to practice completing pragmatically appropriate speech acts in English.



I believe that using exercises for pragmatic experience will be particularly useful for students and can help motivate them to actively learn the target language pragmatics. The exercise I describe below encourages active participation of students in observing scenes in the target language culture, providing students with opportunities to produce what they had noticed, and creating a short dialogue.

All participants from two classes experienced and observed pragmatics by watching excerpts from the TV program *Ugly Betty*. Through my teaching experiences, I found that using movies and TV dramas for studying English highly motivated students. In addition, it attempts to address the problem of lack of appropriate materials, it is relatively short, and the characters and situations are easy to explain to the students. It is expected that by watching the first episode of *Ugly Betty* in season 1, students will be able to recognize speech acts according to the types of situations. When students discuss, I expect this will enable them to use speech acts with their classmates, to understand them in more detail, and to recognize the differences between their own language and the target language. Role play situations will help them practice those speech acts. I anticipate that doing this will raise students' awareness about acquiring speech acts. They watched scenes in *Ugly Betty* and compared their own answers and *Ugly Betty*'s characters' ways of making refusals, requests and apologies in English. They discussed their answers with their classmates and commented on the differences that they noticed. They also created a role play to practice pragmatically appropriate speech acts in English.

### **Situation 1**

In regards to Situation 1, students were asked to imagine what they would say when they have to break up with their romantic partners. They saw a scene in *Ugly Betty* in which Betty was rejected by her boyfriend. They mainly recognized similarities between their own responses and Betty's boyfriend's words (e.g., telling the partner that they are in love with someone else and apologizing to their partner). Some participants commented that they did not find similarities between their own words and Betty's boyfriend's words.

Two participants perceived that they used more ambiguous expressions than those depicted in the scene. For example, in their imagined scenarios they would withhold the information that they were in love with someone else. Interestingly, in these imagined scenarios, some of the participants in the study perceived a use of direct expressions to break up with their partners, such as "I don't like you anymore," or "I want to break up with you." When students such as these recognize that their own responses tend to include more direct expressions than the native English speakers' generally use, it can lead to students' perceptions of pragmatic differences between their first language and English. In this situation, they might also recognize it is better to include expressions which show concern about a partner in this situation.

The greatest difference which participants recognized was the language used to wish Betty luck. In the scene, Betty's boyfriend wished her luck, but there were no such expressions in the participants' own imagined responses. In certain circumstances, it is common for Americans to wish others luck, but in Japan, there is no such custom. Therefore, even if these participants recognized the meaning and usage of "Good luck" in English, they might not think to use this expression in such a serious situation because they do not have the custom to do so. In this context, students need to understand ways to express concern about a partner's feelings.

### **Situation 2**

In regards to Situation 2, students were asked to imagine that they are working at an office and they want to make a request to their assistant to take cabbage out of the coleslaw that was prepared for lunch. Then they saw a scene in Ugly Betty in which her boss requested that Betty take the cabbage out of his coleslaw. In this situation, most of the participants indicated they would make a direct request, which clearly states that they don't like cabbage.

Almost all the participants indicated that they were surprised to see her boss had never directly told Betty that he hates cabbage. Instead of telling her that, he was trying to say what he likes about coleslaw by giving detailed instructions to Betty. Participants found that their own responses were more direct and threatening than the words of Betty's boss. For example, 'I'll fire you if you can't.' This can be a pragmalinguistic failure which is related to participants' English proficiency to use correct vocabulary and appropriate expressions according to the situation. In addition, some participants pointed out that in their own responses they apologized to the assistant, but the boss didn't apologize to the assistant in the scene.

### **Situation 3**

In Situation 3, students were to imagine the situation in which they would be working overtime and must make a call to their sister to say that they cannot go home to celebrate their father's birthday. Then they saw a scene of Ugly Betty in which Betty had to do the same thing. In this situation, the most common similarity found by participants of both groups was to respond to the sister that she couldn't go home because she was busy working. There were two remarkable differences that participants pointed out. First, Betty said, "I'll get home as soon as I can," but only one participant used this expression. Most participants said, "I can't go home until this work is done." Because work is given priority, it is acceptable in Japan to use the excuse of working as a polite refusal. Having said that, it is evident that students need to learn how to express their intention of trying to solve a problem in this context.

Participants apologized in this situation even though Betty didn't apologize in the scene. Apologizing at first when one cannot fulfill others wishes is common in Japanese even if the person who is apologizing is not at fault. For that reason, they tended to apologize at the start of their conversations. This is evidence of pragmatic transfer by Japanese learners of English. Betty did not use any words of apology, but none of the participants commented that she was rude or her behavior was insolent. The participants seemed to be surprised about Betty because she showed them the way to apologize without expressing words of apology in an obvious way. The comments given by the participants can be related to their own sociocultural norms.

### **Discussion**

While providing opportunities for practice in pragmatic competence, I found out that students from the two classes quite actively discussed differences between their own responses and utterances in the scene. This indicates that pragmatic experiences motivate students to participate in English class.



Forty seven students expressed an increase in feeling a sense of accomplishment after the pragmatic experience. Fifteen students of both groups commented that participating in pragmatic activities was not hard for them. Also, students could recognize pragmatic differences between English learners and native speakers of English through pragmatic experiences.

Additionally, it seems that they enjoyed making their own roleplays and practicing them. Even if we allow for the possibility that expressions in the scene were not spontaneous and not grammatically correct, it is clear that using dramas as English teaching materials can raise the pragmatic awareness of EFL learners and motivate them to understand and develop pragmatic competence.

Teachers should give students as many opportunities as possible to practice their communicative competence in the language classroom. It is my hope that the reports will be useful to teachers and materials developers by providing insight into the problems of motivation that EFL students have in learning English and in how some class exercises can raise their pragmatic awareness.

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Hitomi Abe is a part-time teacher of English at Doshisha Women's College and Doshisha University. She received her Ph.D. in English Language and Literature from Doshisha Women's College. Her research interests include the teaching of L2 pragmatics in EFL classes, specifically apologies and refusals.

# Teaching Polite Requests



By David Clayton

Japanese university students at beginner and intermediate levels typically have limited declarative knowledge of the features of “polite” requests. A typical classroom example of students’ limitations in this area is when students ask a teacher to play an audio sample for a second time. This often takes the form of “One more, please!”. Eliciting polite request language in response to this usually yields “Please” and less commonly “Could you?”. This is usually the limit of students’ declarative knowledge of polite language. Polite requests are not the main focus of my speaking courses, just one element that I can focus on as student weaknesses in this area become evident. This being said, they are surely a vital element of a student’s linguistic survival kit if they are to travel abroad or interact in any real-life situation. To help students develop their ability to make polite requests, their sociopragmatic competence and their pragmalinguistic competence, I employ a process of explicit instruction, noticing via observation, and practice producing polite requests in a variety of situations. This article will explain how I teach polite requests using negative politeness strategies to lower and intermediate level (CEFR A2–B1) Japanese university students in English speaking classes.

## **Negative politeness strategies**

In my classes, I focus on negative politeness strategies. Ignoring for the purposes of this article the debate over the nuances of the nature of each type of politeness (and how it is possible and fairly common to blend both within one polite request speech act), it seems to me that it is more profitable, useful and less risky for EFL students to learn negative politeness strategies first. In other words, the potential for misunderstanding and/or inadvertently causing offence seems to be greater if beginner and intermediate students attempt to use positive politeness strategies than if they focus on negative politeness strategies. Consider the list in Table One, in which Brown and Levinson (1987, pp. 102, 131, in Grundy, 2008, p. 221) give the strategies available for each type of politeness:

Table 1 Adapted from Grundy (2008, p. 224)

Positive politeness	Negative politeness
Notice/attend to hearer's wants	Be conventionally indirect
Exaggerate interest/approval	Question, hedge
Intensify interest	Be pessimistic
Use in-group identity markers	Minimize imposition
Seek agreement	Give deference
Avoid disagreement	Apologize
Presuppose/assert common ground	Impersonalize
Joke	State the imposition <u>as a general rule</u>
Assert knowledge of hearer's wants	Nominalize
Offer, promise	Go on record as incurring a debt
Be optimistic	
Include speaker and hearer in the activity	
Give (or ask for) reasons	
Assume/assert reciprocity	
Give gifts to the hearer (goods, sympathy, etc.)	

Many readers may have inwardly winced when students attempt positive politeness strategies in an inappropriate context. This seems to be particularly salient in emails to university professors (Hi Dave, LOL! ;-) ), but could give cause for actual offence in a real life interaction where a non-native speaker misjudges the social relationships in a situation (Chuck us a menu, will you? Got the time, mate?). Another example where using a positive politeness strategy could be problematic, is when responding to a request or suggestion by avoiding disagreement (That's a good idea) rather than expressing one's true desires in an appropriate, negatively polite way. Furthermore, in many English L1 countries (and indeed in Japan), "politeness" as understood by non-linguists usually refers to negative politeness, and has positive connotations in society (Grundy 2008), so Japanese students tend to be noticeably interested in the subject. Thus, negative politeness strategies may be cognitively salient to beginner and intermediate EFL learners and serve as the best (and safest!) introduction to polite requests. The polite request strategies shown in the lesson plan below are also a good starting point from which students may build their pragmatic competence. It should be noted, however, that "Explanations" in the model in Step 8 could be considered a positive or a negative strategy; it could imply that the hearer can help the listener (positive), or it could imply that the speaker is showing consideration for the hearer (negative). This highlights the subtle complexities of politeness theory.

### Explicit instruction of polite requests

There is evidence that explicit instruction is an effective way to help students understand and produce polite requests. Takimoto (2008, p. 31) studied form-focused instruction used to teach polite requests to Japanese students and found that, "...explicit input-based instruction was effective both deductively and inductively for learners' comprehension and production of English polite requests." Rose and Ng (2001 in Takimoto 2008) found that explicit instruction on metapragmatic information before students conducted tasks that focused on compliments and compliment responses was effective in developing pragmalinguistic competence. Furthermore, due to limited time resources, it is, in my opinion, more efficient to bring these features "front and centre" prior to undertaking noticing tasks.



## Polite requests

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), the degree to which polite strategies are required can be calculated by this formula:

**Power** Differential (**P**) + Social **Distance** (**D**) + Ratio of **Imposition** (**I**) = degree of face-threat to be redressed by appropriate linguistic strategy (or **Weight** (**W**)). (adapted from Grundy, 2008: 221). It can be useful to visualize this in terms of the sliders on a mixing desk (see the picture on the right).

Any request situation will feature a combination of these factors. Adjusting each of the factors will result in a different level of politeness being required to make a successful polite request. So, for example, the strategies used in a request between siblings (low/no power differential, low/no distance differential) would likely be entirely dependent on the imposition imposed by the request.



Lesson plan for teaching polite requests (minimum 90 minutes, more with options).

1. Elicit “polite language”.
2. Elicit situations in which polite language may be used.
3. Focus on requests.
4. Explain Power, Distance and Imposition, giving examples (feel free to use the mixing desk analogy).
5. Using the example, lend me a pen, demonstrate the request without any exponents to show how inappropriate it sounds in most situations.
6. Elicit/introduce simple exponents for the “Head Act”.

Can you...? Could you...?

7. Explain that in situations with extreme PDI differentials, the head act should be preceded and followed by various phrases to “soften” the weight of the request. As more phrases are added, we can consider the request to be more “polite” (or less direct). In other words, in English (just as in Japanese) longer generally equals more polite. A simple example of this is that could is considered to be more polite than can.

8. Provide the following model (use more or fewer exponents for each stage depending on the level of the class), stressing that to include every stage would be an extremely polite/indirect request, and is used only infrequently. Some stages such as the pre-apology and explanation may be omitted for less weighty requests.

Opening	Pre-apology	Explanation	Link	Request	Minimise the request	Head Act
Excuse me	I'm (terribly/really) sorry to bother you, but...	The thing is...	...so ...	Can/Could you/I... Do you think I/you could...	...just... ...kind of... ...sort of...	lend me a pen?  borrow a pen?
Could I ask you a favour?	I know you are really busy, but...	Unfortunately... I'm afraid...		I was wondering if I/you could ...  Would it be possible to...  Do you think I might be able to...  Would you mind if I...		borrowed a pen?
Can you help me with something?						

9. Optional: drill for pronunciation and connected speech.

10. Highlight the following features of polite language, and have students find and highlight examples in the model:

**Tense and aspect:** past tense and continuous aspect are commonly used e.g. ...was wondering...

**Modality** is frequently used e.g. could I... would you...

**Hedging and boosting** are common e.g. terribly, really, ...be possible to..., just

Option: introduce the following model for post-head act phrases:

**Thanks**  
Thank you  
Thank you so much  
Thank you very much  
I really appreciate it  
That is a big help,  
thank you.

**Promise of redress**  
I'll (bring it right back).  
It won't happen again.

11. Noticing tasks

There are many videos available on YouTube that explain and demonstrate polite requests, but finding suitable examples for lower and intermediate level classes can be difficult. The BBC Learning English, "English at Work" series contains many lessons with videos that cover a wide range of situations that require sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic competence to deal with effectively. Here is a link: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/learningenglish/english/features/english-at-work>

Episodes 05 and 22 specifically focus on polite requests, and I have found that having students watch the videos, note which elements of polite requests are realised in them, and which exponents are used to do this is a very effective task that seems to encourage noticing.

12. Producing polite requests

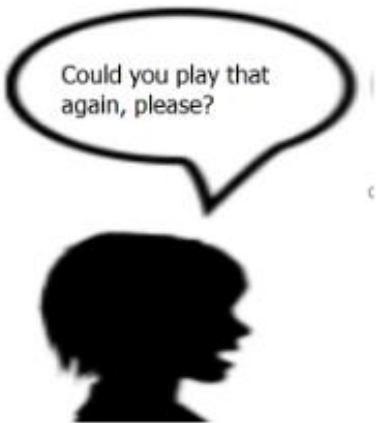
The obvious way to give students practice producing polite requests is to provide roleplay scenarios, have them act out the situation and provide feedback. This is very effective in a lower-level class where roleplay cards can also include scaffolding in the form of phrases that can be used to complete the task.

In more advanced classes, I have pairs of students create their own situations, and demonstrate them for the class. Observing students then use the following table to rate the weight of the request in terms of PDI, and note important phrases/features as outlined in the model above. This often leads to fruitful discussion about the situation and various alternative possibilities that could be explored to achieve a successful polite request.

Students' names			
Power difference (1-5)	Social Distance (1-5)	Imposition of request (1-5)	Total score (3-15)
Useful phrases:			

An alternative is to give students a copy of the model provided above, and have them note which words/phrases they hear in the role plays.

To conclude, the outline above is a procedure that explains the theory behind polite requests, gives functional exponents within a structure, encourages noticing and gives ample opportunities for practice, feedback and discussion. When I have used certain elements in class, or the procedure in full, students have found it interesting, useful and fun. And as a bonus, students who want to hear an audio sample a second time now ask, "Could you play that again, please?", which makes it all worthwhile.





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David Clayton is an Associate Professor in the Department of English at Doshisha Women's College of Liberal Art, Kyoto, Japan. His research interests include Task-Based Learning, Corpus Linguistics and English for Academic Purposes. He is currently studying for a PhD at the University of Leicester in the UK.  
dclayton@dwc.doshisha.ac.jp



# PragSIG Zoom Session Reports

# First Pragmatics SIG Zoom Session of 2021

In 2020 the Pragmatics SIG hosted two zoom sessions to launch the latest book, **Pragmatics Undercover: The Search for Natural Talk in EFL Textbooks**, where people who contributed chapters to the book made presentations. For 2021 we decided it would be good to provide a space for our members to present their work, both research and pedagogical practice. Thus, on February 22, 2021, the SIG held its first zoom session of the year.

Since **Sanae Oda-Sheehan** had recently finished writing her doctoral dissertation, she was invited to speak about the gap between pragmatic practice and theory. To provide the perfect balance, we also asked **Rob Olson** to share his practical fun-filled class activities that are sure to engage students during online classes. The following are two reports on these presentations.

# Report on Sanae Oda-Sheehan's session: An autoethnographic study—Exploring integrative approaches in the Japanese EFL classroom

This autoethnographic study consists of self-analysis + ethnography + life story. A subtitle for the presentation could be a 'life-sized portrait of an exploratory project'.

Through Sanae's wide experience in business, learning, teaching, and parenting in a multiracial family, she looked for connections in teaching, learning, and L2 pragmatics. From her observations and reflections of what occurs in the classroom vs. in society, how/when grammar is taught vs. communicative language teaching, and the theorizing of pragmatics vs. practicing pragmatics, a conceptual framework emerged that she calls a pedagogic trinity: Communicative Language, L2 Pragmatics, and Grammar.

Her study (with special attention on L2 pragmatics) builds upon an integrative approach connecting the three parts of the triangulation through reflection, understanding, and transformation. Data collection included interviews of participants in a variety of Communities of Practice that were similar to Sanae's own background of multiple identities such as language learner, teacher, researcher, parent, and business person. In addition, personal journaling was part of the data and analysis. In this way, her story connected with the lived stories of the participants.

One strength of the presentation was her explanation that the aim of qualitative research is exploration and process first and foremost. It is rigorous and focused (in her case) by the types of subjects chosen of a similar background to hers for comparison, the transcription, coding, and thematizing of the data. In keeping with her multi-facet approach, Sanae also considered the parents' views. Teaching and learning goes beyond the classroom and teacher-student interactions. What parents think matters.

One interesting discovery that Sanae made when analyzing the data was her own transformation from being confident to losing confidence and then gaining fresh insights into her teaching and multiple identities. I found this noticing important as a timely window of opportunity to learn deeply from her research. She invited the audience to self-reflect, explore their own interests, and 'make meaning of complexities in our lives'.



## Reporter:

Ian Nakamura is Professor Emeritus at Okayama University. He has been a long-time member of JALT and the Pragmatic SIG, and he teaches at various universities. His teaching and continuous professional development are informed by conversation analysis and reflective practice. He enjoys joining teacher and research meetings by Zoom.

[iannaka@okayama-u.ac.jp](mailto:iannaka@okayama-u.ac.jp)



## Presenter:

Sanae Oda-Sheehan is a graduate of Teachers College, Columbia University and recently received her PhD from Ochanomizu University. She teaches at Senshu University and also works as a communication consultant utilizing her business background. Her research interests include teacher identity, L2 pragmatics, and communicative task effectiveness.



# Report on Rob Olson's session: Zoom Activities that Close the Distance on Distance Learning

Rob Olson began by stating his presentation would be “like going from chocolate souffle [Oda-Sheehan’s presentation] to peanut butter and jelly sandwiches [his own],” but his self-deprecation is undeserved. While I love chocolate souffle, I seldom eat it. Peanut butter sandwiches, on the other hand, have sustained me throughout my life.

Olson demonstrated several creative activities that boost students’ motivation for communication during Zoom lessons. These activities were not designed to measure students’ English proficiency nor to correct their answers. Olson’s goal was simply to encourage students to turn on their cameras and talk with each other during Zoom sessions.

Olson first demonstrated how to do **Verbal Crossword Puzzles** on a shared PowerPoint slide, filling in the squares as participants called out the answers. He then moved on to **Match Game Live**, modeled on the American TV game show from the 1960s and 70s. In the game, students try to match their answers to fill-in-the blank questions with those of a chosen student (examples: What is your favorite fruit? \_\_\_\_\_ / What is the most dangerous animal in Japan? \_\_\_\_\_ or My \_\_\_\_\_ is very dirty). Participants are asked to write down their guess for how they think the chosen student will answer. Then at the prompt, everyone shows their answer, and those whose response matches that of the chosen participant will receive a point.

He next introduced some fun and thought-provoking riddles adapted from the Brightside YouTube program, **35 Best Detective Riddles only the smartest 2% can crack**

[<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cOZDGkagSpQ>].

After commenting that the audio speed might be too fast for students, he was delighted to learn that the playback speed can be slowed down in YouTube settings.

Olson’s penultimate activity was a Zoom version of the murder mystery game **Clue**. The object of the game is to determine who murdered the game’s victim, where the crime took place, and which weapon was used. In a game with 6 suspects, 6 possible murder weapons, and 9 locations, there are 324 possible solutions to the “crime.” In a non-face-to-face environment such as Zoom or Google Meet, it is easy to share the game details. The Clue Master (teacher) randomly selects the three solution cards, and then shares the remaining cards with all the participants, who are asked to close their eyes while others receive their clues. Clues could also be shared privately with each participant via Chat. Each participant then in turn their posits, “Maybe it was (Suspect) with the (weapon) in the (location).” The teacher then confirms or denies the accuracy of the statement.



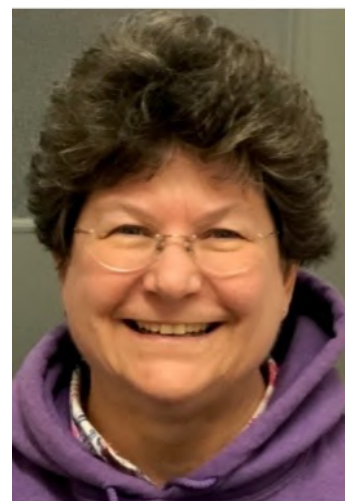
Olson concluded with a variation of the children's card game, Go Fish, where participants try to find who possesses cards with their same numbers (can also be played with adjectives or opposites, or with questions and answers). This game is very effective at getting students to speak up and try to get each other's attention. Do you have a/an \_\_\_\_\_? The first person able to find someone with a match to all the cards they are holding is the winner.

All in all, Olson provided a veritable feast of warming-up activities and conversation-starters that were more than peanut butter. They can provide sustenance to a class by getting students to turn on their cameras and talk with each other.

**Reporter:**

Linda K. Kadota is a professor at Matsuyama Shinonome College. She has been involved in JALT on multiple levels over the years and is currently Program Chair for Matsuyama JALT. Her research interests include integrating elements of local culture into communication activities, meaningful and creative multimedia projects, and ways into poems.

[lindak@shinonome.ac.jp](mailto:lindak@shinonome.ac.jp)



**Presenter:**

Robert Olson is a Lecturer at Sapporo Gakuin University who also teaches kindergarten through adults in Tomakomai, Hokkaido. His research interests include Pragmatics with a focus on Cotext. He also enjoys writing and illustrating and has published two comic books on the differences between American and Japanese culture.



This is Rob's illustration of himself.

## PanSIG 2021 Conference Reports



# PanSIG 2021 Forum Report: International PhDs about Pragmatics in Progress (PPP)

Reported by Todd J. Allen

## Forum Overview:

The importance of pragmatics can be seen in the work of graduate students from around the world. Our Forum features Anh Ton Nu, a Vietnamese teacher working on her PhD through Macquarie University in Australia. She is focused on including pragmatics in teacher education for Vietnamese high school teachers. The other panelist is Hind Baadache from the University of Biskra in Algeria, and she is investigating why students have difficulty making requests politely. For short, our forum can be called, PPP—Pragmatics in PhDs in Progress.

## Introduction (Donna Fujimoto, Coordinator, Pragmatics SIG and moderator):

Not only did Fujimoto moderate the session, but she also gave an excellent introduction. She detailed the status of our SIG as well as her vision for the future of our group. She noted that our SIG started about twenty years ago and has grown to include 130 plus members. However, she hoped to develop the SIG to include more members not only from within Japan but also from across the globe. Fujimoto noted that the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted our lives in many negative ways. However, the silver lining is that the advances in technology improved our ability to connect, and thus scholars and teachers are able to access a wider audience by presenting at online conferences. In the future, Fujimoto expressed her hopes to further include early-career researchers and teachers who are engaged in the study and teaching of pragmatics.

In my view, this forum achieved those hopes. In this forum, young scholars who are completing their PhDs at universities in Australia and Algeria, presented their research which is focused on teaching English pragmatics. The following paragraphs provide a short summary of their presentations.

## Teacher education in Australia and Vietnam: An introduction to pragmatics (Anh Ton Nu)

Ton Nu investigated the under-researched area of pragmatics in ELT materials. In her initial review of the literature, she found that ELT textbooks often failed to provide adequate examples of the pragmatic features of discourse required for learners. In addition, using questionnaires and interview data, she investigated the teaching practices of pragmatics in courses in Australian and Vietnamese universities. She found that while there were some positive trends in the teaching of pragmatics to future English teachers, there was a lot of disparity in how pragmatics were taught in both contexts. Based on her research, Ton Nu recommended that teachers should be given the opportunity to develop their knowledge on the subject area in two areas: (1) how to teach L2 pragmatics, and (2) how to assess L2 pragmatic abilities.



## **The difficulty of making requests politely (Hind Baadache)**

In this presentation, Baadache discussed some of the reasons why L2 English students struggle to develop appropriate utterances when performing requests. Using a qualitative and exploratory approach, Baadache observed classrooms where second-year university students were studying English in Algeria. In addition, Baadache interviewed teachers about their perceptions of pragmatic teaching in their courses and the consensus of pragmatic teaching in the university. Through this study, she found that learners were only exposed to the form rather than the functions of language (typically through grammar lessons on modal verbs). Teaching often ignored discussions on contextual use of language (e.g., with whom, how and when). Instead, classes tended to focus on the correctness of grammar rather than the appropriateness of language use. In addition, the use of language focused on L1 situations rather than the foreign language context. Baadache also found that there was a lack of practice and time in classes which affected students' pragmatic development. Furthermore, there were no coordinated sessions to discuss these issues among teachers, leading to poor staff development surrounding pragmatics. These were areas where she claimed teachers could improve and to deliver implicit and explicit pragmatic activities for students.

### **Conclusion**

During the Q&A time, both presenters offered further insights into their respective presentations. Audience members also discussed some of the implications of their research, as well as their similar experiences teaching pragmatics. This led to an interesting discussion on “dangerous language” (when and when not to use modal verbs) and the use of authentic language and materials in the classroom. I wish to thank both presenters for their very insightful and thought-provoking presentations, as well as Donna Fujimoto for organising the forum.



### **Reporter:**

Todd J. Allen is currently an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Foreign Languages at Kansai University where he teaches language skills and intercultural communication. He completed his PhD at the University of Queensland in sociolinguistics. His research interests include socio-pragmatics, study abroad, and intercultural and academic communication education and development.



**Presenter 1: Anh Ton Nu**  
**PhD candidate in Linguistics, at**  
**Macquarie University, Australia.**



**Presenter 2: Hind Baadache**  
**PhD candidate in Applied**  
**Linguistics, at Biskra University,**  
**Algeria.**

# Practice Tasks for Speech Acts in Textbooks

Reported by: S. Kathleen Kitao

Presented by: Chie Kawashima

In this presentation, Chie Kawashima began by introducing speech acts and reviewing previous studies of ELT textbooks which indicated that textbooks in Japan, Spain, and Iran emphasized linguistic forms at the expense of speech acts. In this study, Kawashima focused on how communicative the activities to practice speech acts were. She compared five international textbooks with seven Japanese high school textbooks of a similar level, specifically looking at what types of speech acts were practiced in the textbooks, how communicative these tasks were, and what the differences were between opportunities to practice in the two types of textbooks.

Using Dubin and Olshtain's (1986) categorization system for levels of communicativeness, Kawashima considered the exercises in the two types of textbooks. She found that in general, the international textbooks had activities that were more communicative for the more frequent speech acts of asking for and expressing opinions, agreeing and disagreeing, giving advice, making offers, making proposals, and requesting. The only exception was communicative activities for expressing opinions, which were found in five of the textbooks. As Kawashima pointed out, expressing opinions is emphasized in the Course of Study, which explains why that is the one speech act that Japanese high school textbooks emphasize.

Kawashima found that the international textbooks often emphasized communicative practice of speech acts, while the emphasis in the Japanese high school textbooks was on linguistic information. She concluded that teachers of the Japanese textbook would need to add their own supplementary activities to link existing linguistics tasks to tasks that give students the opportunity to practice speech acts communicatively.

Kawashima has done a useful study, describing the problems with Japanese high school textbooks and also suggesting that teacher training related to supplementary communicative activities for speech acts would improve teachers' ability to exploit what is already in the textbooks.

## References

Dubin, F., & Olshtain, E. (1986). *Course design: Developing programs and materials for language learning*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

# Don't Say This, Say That

Reported by: S. Kathleen Kitao

Presented by: Rob Olson

Rob Olson presented the poster session, "Don't Say This, Say That," which dealt with the problem of "Wasei Eigo," loan words in Japanese that originated in English or sound like they originated in English. These words may not have the same meaning, so Japanese students may use them when speaking English without realizing that they have a different meaning than the loan word in Japanese.

Olson made three points at the beginning. First, it is often the most dedicated English students who make these mistakes, because they are trying to use every resource to communicate. Second, there are a variety of social issues that affect communication, including microaggressions and politically correctness. Third, there is the issue of cotext, which means not only utterances that came before but the previous experiences of each speaker.

Olson suggested that to deal with the problem of Wasei Eigo, teachers can give examples of mistakes they have heard. For example, Olson said that he had heard some of his students refer to basketball player Michael Jordan as a "skinhead" because his head is shaved, but Olson needed to explain to the students that this word actually has a very different meaning in English. He also suggested two strategies. First, teachers can give students expressions they can use before using Wasei Eigo that they aren't sure about, such as "I'm not sure if this is correct, but..." Also after they have made a mistake and are corrected, they can say, "I'm sorry," or "I didn't realize it meant that." Finally, he provided a list of words that he has collected that students often confuse, along with the word or expression students should use instead. The words on the list included naive (ナイブ), by which students mean "sensitive," challenge (チャレンジ), by which the students mean "to try," and cunning (カンニング), by which the students mean cheating.



# Possibility and Challenges of Online Language Exchanges

Reported by: Yaoko Matsuoka

Presented by: Yukie Saito

Yukie Saito presented her research on online language exchanges between Japanese university students and university students learning Japanese in the United States. Twenty subjects from each university participated in five collaborative online talking sessions via Zoom on five different topics familiar to them, e.g., self-introduction, shopping, and seasonal events of each country. Data were extracted from the questionnaire survey and students' journals filled in by Japanese students. Results of the questionnaire were examined from the multiple viewpoints of intercultural competence, CEFR-based language skills, and competences such as listening and speaking, foreign language anxiety, learning motivation, and pragmatic competence. As a pragmatic researcher, I was particularly interested that Saito focused on participants' speech-production flows in online exchanges, showing interest, asking questions, using backchannels appropriately, repeating the counterpart's speech, and their willingness to share interests with each other.


The questionnaire survey results, based on a four-point Likert scale, show that Japanese students deepened their cultural understanding of university life in the U.S. They also improved their motivation to study English and have English conversations to a certain extent. However, as for foreign language anxiety, many students answered that they were still not confident in speaking English and reluctant to talk with native English speakers. In terms of CEFR-related skills, it seems students improved their listening skills and speaking skills considerably. It was also reported that students felt they made progress on their pragmatic competence: abilities to initiate or maintain conversation, using backchannels appropriately, and asking questions spontaneously. Yukie also presented some examples of student journal entries, which showed how students were actually feeling and thinking in the five intercultural exchange opportunities. The researcher found that they were aware of the importance of showing a positive attitude to maintain the conversation.

It was an impressive presentation. The questionnaire included 16 well-polished question items covering four crucial points of language acquisition, while the example journal entries showed students' sincere attitudes in their participation in the virtual overseas exchange. This study showed the potential and challenges of online intercultural exchange as a solid alternative for overseas programs in an age when it is difficult for every student to study abroad.

**Reporter:** Yaoko Matsuoka is a Research Fellow at the Institute for Educational Research and Service at International Christian University. Having recently retired from Kokugakuin University, she currently teaches at Shibaura Institute of Technology and at Seijo University. Her research interests include second language acquisition, pragmatics, learner autonomy, communication strategies, and ICT use in L2 instruction.



# Upcoming Events

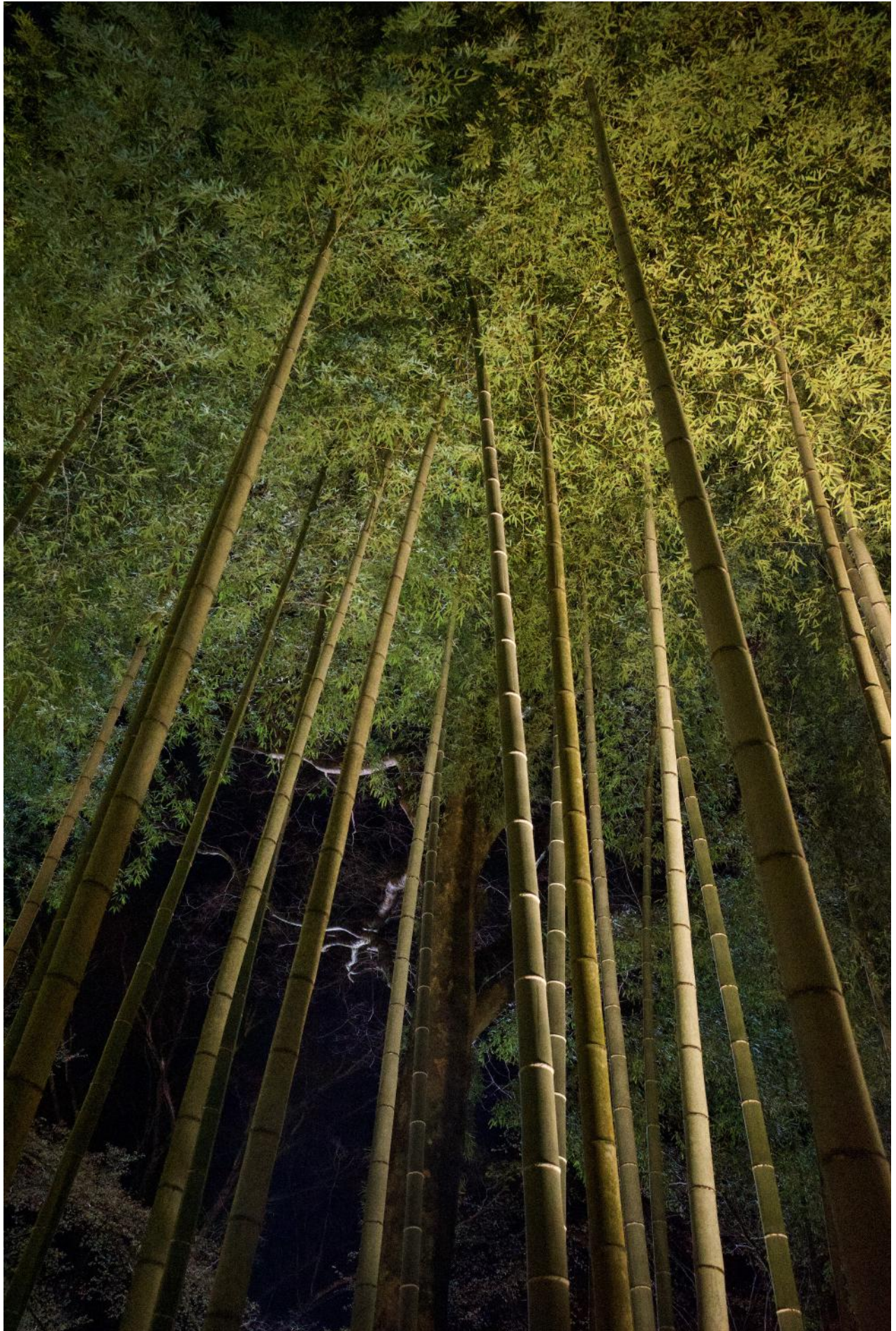


## Pragmatics SIG July 2021 Zoom

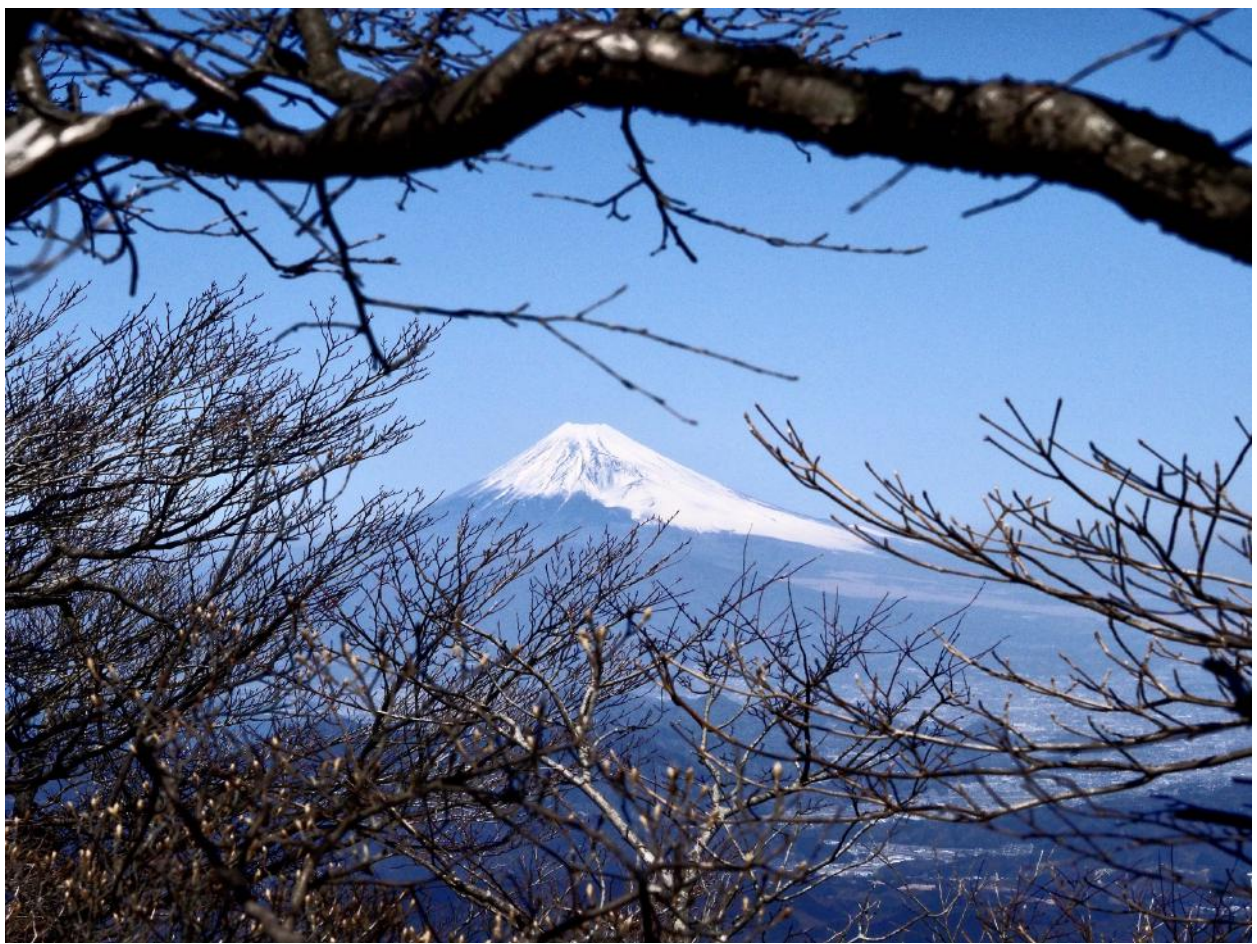
- **When?** July 31, 2021 (Sat.)
- **What time?** 8:00 – 9:00 p.m.
- **Who?** Yaoko Matsuoka and Benio Suzuki
- **Après-zoom:** Join us for informal socializing after 9.
- **Members and non-members welcome:** To receive zoom link, contact:  
[fujimotodonna@gmail.com](mailto:fujimotodonna@gmail.com)



# Photographs by Tim Knight







# Photographs by Tim Knight







**Photographs by Tim  
Knight**



# Pragmatics SIG Committee Members (2021)

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