



Review of *Teaching pragmatics and instructed second language learning: Study abroad and technology-enhanced learning*

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Teaching pragmatics and instructed second language learning: Study abroad and technology-enhanced learning

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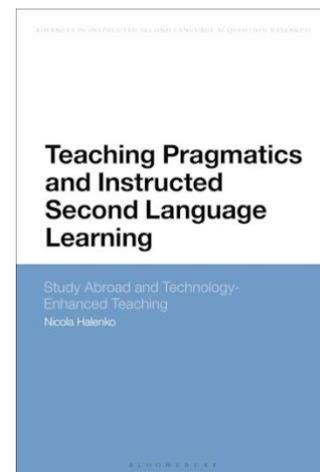
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Teaching Pragmatics and Instructed Second Language Learning: Study Abroad and Technology-Enhanced Learning by Nicola Halenko presents a study that focuses on the learning and teaching of requests and apologies in a study abroad (SA) context. More specifically, this book is the first to explore the effects of technology-mediated versus paper-based instruments on the development of pragmatic competence. Additionally, it explores the effects of pragmatic instruction and SA setting on the simultaneous learning and teaching of two speech acts by Chinese ESL students in the UK. This volume is a monograph dedicated to one particular research study, where the introductions and summaries of each chapter facilitate the understanding of the details of this study and help navigate this monograph more easily.

This book is divided into 10 chapters. Chapters 1 through 4 review the literature on the topics of pragmatics, second language (L2) pragmatics, second language acquisition (SLA) theories related to pragmatic learning, L2 pragmatic instruction, as well as on the speech acts of requests and apologies. The research gaps and research questions (RQs) are provided in Chapter 5, whereas the methodology of this study is described in Chapter 6. Chapters 7 and 8 encompass the research findings on pragmatic production and effect of SA respectively. Finally, the author discusses the findings in Chapter 9 and presents the conclusions, limitations, and directions for further investigations in Chapter 10. Following the chapters are a list of notes, the list of references, and three appendices. The latter include two data collection methods as well as an extended description of the explicit pragmatic instruction implemented in this study. The following sections provide a more detailed review of each chapter in this volume.

In Chapter 1, Halenko introduces the reader to the research areas and main goals underpinning this study. The research areas covered feature pragmatics, L2 pragmatics, and pragmatics instruction. Then, particular current gaps in the aforementioned research areas are addressed to situate this study in the

existing literature. The goals of the study include: (a) the exploration of pragmatic instruction in multiple groups, on two speech acts, and with various data collection methods; (b) the influence of the SA environment for all participant groups receiving and not receiving instruction; (c) the use of rating scales to assess pragmatic performance; and (d) the benefits of using technology in pragmatics learning and teaching. Halenko then briefly introduces the participants (Chinese speakers learning English as an L2) and the target pragmatic features, namely apologies and requests in institutional talk. Thus, she highlights cultural, linguistic, and pragmatic differences between English and Chinese, and the potential communication breakdowns and social and personal consequences that unsuccessful pragmatic interactions bring to L2 users. Finally, the author outlines the main research aims. Although many of the concepts that Halenko discusses are well known in the fields of pragmatics and L2 pragmatics, this concise introductory chapter can be quite useful for readers who may not be as familiar with these topics.

Chapters 2 and 3 further delve into the essential role of pragmatic instruction. Chapter 2 presents a broader overview of different theories of SLA and teaching and learning components, including pragmalinguistics, sociopragmatics, speech act and politeness theories, and the role of input, output, feedback, and culture. These competences and components help explain what is needed to become a pragmatically competent L2 user from an L2 processing perspective. In addition, the author further elaborates on and reiterates the importance of teaching pragmatics prior to a SA journey.

Chapter 3 focuses more specifically on the hands-on nature of pragmatic instruction. First, the author describes a series of fundamental tenets of teaching L2 pragmatics, including an awareness-raising approach, promotion of student agency, and provision of ample practice opportunities. This is later illustrated with studies following such principles that focus on the key components in this volume: SA, interventional approaches, speech act instruction, the teaching of pragmatic routines, and the discussion of the importance of raising pragmatic awareness among teacher trainees. Finally, the chapter examines studies on L2 pragmatics teaching using technology-enhanced platforms.

Chapter 4 reviews existing research on requests and apologies. The author follows the same structure, first defining the speech acts and explaining their components and then reviewing studies that feature the given speech act. As noted by Halenko, she considered only the studies undertaken in East Asian countries, including China, South Korea, and Japan, as they share similar cultural values that affect the L1 language users' behavioral and linguistic choices. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 are very informative because they summarize the key aspects of literature on instructional pragmatics and the speech acts of requests and apologies. Providing this information helps the author build her case regarding the paramount role of learning L2 pragmatic competence and the intricacies of using requests and apologies in an L2, which is particularly essential in light of the differences between the pragmatic systems of English and Chinese. Additionally, a review of well-established and more recent studies presents a comprehensive and critical evaluation of the topics at hand.

Halenko starts Chapter 5 by introducing the research design of the study, which is a mixed methods quasi-experimental design. Then, she explains what written and oral discourse completion tasks (WDCT and ODCT) are, including their advantages and disadvantages, to provide the grounds for the employment of her two pragmatic data collection methods: the oral computer-animated production task (CAPT) and the paper-based WDCT. Halenko then briefly describes naturally occurring data collection, which is the collection of pragmatic production that occurs without any restrictions or modifications in any given L2 context, such as within or outside the academic environment. The author concludes this chapter by discussing the L2 research areas that deserve further consideration in relation to this volume and stating the three research questions guiding the study.

Chapter 6 comprises the methodology of the study. Following a detailed account of the pilot study, Halenko introduces the participant cohort, which is divided into two experimental groups (CAPT and PAPER) and a control group. She also introduces the three main instruments: the CAPT, paper-based WDCT, and SA language contact questionnaire. Then, she describes both the instructional and testing data collection, as well as the data analysis, including the coding strategies and statistical analyses.

Chapters 5 and 6 provide extensive information about the study and the steps Halenko took to make her study more meaningful and relevant for the existing literature, thus addressing the gaps in the current literature on L2 pragmatic learning, teaching, and the use of technology.

Chapter 7 reports the research findings regarding the two types of speech acts, namely requests and apologies. Three groups of results are presented in this chapter: the raters' assessment of a pre-test and an immediate post-test, the results of the linguistic data analysis, and the language features students drew from their L1 pragmatic knowledge. The findings show that pragmatic intervention was beneficial to both experimental groups for both speech acts. Particularly, the technology-enhanced (CAPT) group outperformed the paper-based (PAPER) group and the use of non-target-like expressions decreased with time for both groups. The control group was unable to improve their request or apology performance during the study.

Another set of findings is reported in Chapter 8. Here the author reports on the findings from the SA language contact questionnaire. This questionnaire investigated the possible effects of an L2 setting on participants' engagement with different activities in the L2 (Part A), as well as an evaluation of their skills (Part B) during a pre-test (T1), an immediate post-test (T2), and a six-week delayed post-test (T4) (CAPT and PAPER only at T4). Part A findings reveal that both experimental groups used their receptive skills more frequently than their productive skills during the pre-test. This changed by the immediate post-test, where both types of skills were used exponentially more often. However, by the time of the six-week delayed post-test, the use of both skill types decreased significantly except for the CAPT's receptive skills, the use of which continued to increase. Part B results reveal that all students in all three groups found their skills improving a little or moderately. Specifically, writing was consistently rated as the least improved skill, whereas the participants obtained higher scores on listening and interaction. No skill received the highest score on a 5-point scale. Chapters 7 and 8 illustrate the extensive and robust data analyses of both pragmatic production and the effect of the SA setting. These analyses are very valuable for the study since Halenko identifies and illustrates the effect of the variables (i.e., instruction, data collection method, and L2 context) on the participant's learning of requests and apologies across time from T1 to T4.

Chapter 9 is dedicated to the discussion of the results presented in the previous two chapters. RQ1 addressed the effectiveness of explicit pragmatic instruction for the development of speech acts. Although attrition was found at a two-week delayed post-test (T3) and a six-week delayed post-test (T4), explicit instruction was indeed effective at T2. Students improved both their pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic knowledge, consistently utilized formulaic language, and reduced the use of non-L2-like features. In light of these findings, Halenko advises instructors to frequently review pragmatic teaching materials and practice pragmatic components after any given intervention, which should facilitate the challenging process of acquiring pragmatic competence. This advice suggests that pragmatic competence is more important than its grammatical counterpart for ESL contexts. RQ2 investigated the effectiveness of the CAPT versus the paper-based materials for the production of requests and apologies. The technology-enhanced nature of the CAPT seems to explain why the CAPT group tended to outperform the PAPER group significantly and frequently in short-term recall but not in long-term recall. Nevertheless, as Halenko notes, the quality of the pragmatic production of the CAPT students and their reference to situations in the CAPT even months after the investigation support previous studies on the effectiveness of this instrument, providing scaffolded, meaningful exposure to, and abundant and contextualized pragmatic input. RQ3 tackled the effect of the SA environment on the pragmatic development of requests and apologies. Students' self-reports indicated that they engaged with the L2 and their receptive and productive skills improved gradually with time. Although individual variation was found, these results seem to support an overall positive role of the L2 environment for this particular cohort. Halenko thoroughly and meaningfully discusses the results of her study. Drawing similarities and differences between her findings and the findings of other studies adds value to the results and helps the reader understand them and link them to previous studies as well as to potential future investigations.

The final chapter of this book (i.e., Chapter 10) draws the conclusions, discusses the limitations, and offers directions for future research. In the conclusions, this volume describes its contributions to the existing literature on various levels. Theoretically, it further supports studies in instructed second language acquisition (ISLA) that concern the noticing, output, and interaction hypotheses; the research design, the technology-enhanced materials utilized in this study, and the monitoring of L2 interaction outside of the higher education environment provide new insights into these theoretical underpinnings for pragmatic learning. Methodologically, having two experimental groups and two pragmatic data collection instruments allowed for the comparison of the data and for measuring the effectiveness of pragmatic instruction and materials. Additionally, a particular intervention on requests and apologies that was designed for this study was compared to the effectiveness of SA exposure for learning these two speech acts, which has received scant attention in the literature. Lastly, employing the CAPT allowed for the use of a technology-enhanced instrument to both teach learners about apologies and requests and elicit and collect large amounts of data. Despite some issues related to its use, the CAPT seemed effective as it included real-life communicative situations and speech features that students may find while using the L2 in and outside the academic context. Pedagogically, this study provides insights into the general pragmatic instruction design, as well as into different ways (e.g., technology-mediated intervention, the use of an awareness-raising approach) to maximize the teaching and learning of apologies and requests in such teaching designs.

In Chapter 10, the author also discusses several limitations of her study. First, the cohort was small, which decreases the generalizability of the results. Second, the study was conducted in a short period of time. A longitudinal study would be more suitable for detecting changes in pragmatic development. Third, several pragmatic and SA-related questions remain unanswered, for example “What contributed to the ease with which formulaic language was learned during the instruction?” (p. 359). Hence, including qualitative instruments such as retrospective verbal protocols in the future would help answer those questions. Finally, regarding data collection tools, the results from the language contact questionnaire should be considered preliminary rather than conclusive as they reflect students’ own perceptions.

Regarding instruments, the CAPT was used for two different purposes, as a data collection instrument and as a teaching material. Refining the instrument would further contribute to the existing literature on pragmatic learning and teaching. As far as the directions for further research, Halenko recommends including pragmatic needs analysis prior to any investigation to identify and gauge students’ interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) needs to develop their pragmatic competence. Secondly, she propounds the idea of using formulaic language in the teaching of requests and apologies, as it proved effective in this study. The author’s final recommendation is to monitor students’ communicative goals and interlocutors’ expectations to favor pragmatic competence over grammatical competence.

Halenko’s book is a timely contribution to the fields of Interlanguage Pragmatics (ILP) and Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), and can be of interest to a wide audience ranging from graduate students to early-career researchers and more seasoned scholars. For ILP, the book provides valuable data on speech acts. While speech acts have already received generous attention in English as a foreign language (EFL) studies on L2 pragmatics, Halenko explores this topic in a new context: Chinese ESL students in the UK, which has received significantly less attention in the literature. Additionally, Halenko’s study includes pragmatics instruction on multiple speech acts at once and considers the effect of the SA context on the learning of apologies and requests. For CALL, this volume enriches its literature as it highlights the benefits of using a technology-enhanced material (the CAPT) compared to its paper-based counterpart, the paper-based WDCT. Unlike the paper-based task, the CAPT afforded a different, more meaningful and engaging pragmatic learning experience that considered the linguistic, pragmatic, and non-verbal features of a culture and language. The findings reported in this study are also of high value to both ILP and CALL and should be considered for further investigations of these speech acts. The SA questionnaire can be found in its entirety in Appendix 1 of the text. The availability of these instruments may encourage replication studies, which further expand our understanding of the learning of requests and apologies by Chinese native speakers who are L2 English learners in the UK. As Halenko

states, “(t)he intention [with this book] is to address some of the current shortcomings and offer a replicable contribution to experimental studies” (p. 24). One shortcoming of this book is that some abbreviations such as “HE” found in section ‘1.2 Research scope’ in Chapter 1 are not defined. Additionally, the data collection times (T1, T2, T3, and T4) are listed abbreviated earlier in the book in the list of figures, whereas their definition is only provided a few chapters later. Even though the meaning of some abbreviations can be deducted from the context relatively easy, having a list of abbreviations at the beginning of the book would be helpful and obviate the need for readers to play a guessing game.

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