Pragmatic Awareness in Second Language Acquisition

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The concept of pragmatic awareness has become fully part of the literature on second language pragmatics. Theoretical accounts of the development of second language pragmatics have appealed to the awareness or attention of learners (Bialystok, 1993; Schmidt, 1993, 1995) and today discussions of awareness in L2 pragmatics are still framed in terms of Schmidt’s noticing hypothesis (1990, 1993, 1995). Pragmatic awareness is frequently defined roughly as noticing with or without understanding. In interlanguage pragmatics, the terms ‘noticing’ and ‘awareness’ are often used interchangeably.

Schmidt argues that pragmatic learning requires attention to “linguistic forms, functional meanings, and the relevant contextual features” (1993: 35). Kasper (1996) cites three conditions for the acquisition of pragmatic knowledge: “There must be pertinent input, the input has to be noticed, and learners need ample opportunity to develop a high level of control…” (p. 148). Schmidt contrasts noticing, “registering the simple occurrence of some event”, with understanding, which “implies recognition of a general principle, rule or pattern” (p. 26). To illustrate, Schmidt contrasts an example of noticing in pragmatics with an example of understanding:

Awareness that on a particular occasion someone says to their interlocutor something like, “I’m terribly sorry to bother you, but if you have time could you look at this problem?” is a matter of noticing. Relating the various forms used to their strategic deployment in the service of politeness and recognizing their co-occurrence with elements of context such as social distance, power, level of imposition and so on, are all matters of understanding

Schmidt, 1995: 30

Schmidt (1993) recounts six instances of noticing in language learning and intercultural communication: excuses realized by conditionals, telephone closings, and postcard openings in Brazilian Portuguese; timing of closings in Thai; bipolar kin terms in Arabic; and hints in the L2 English of L1 Japanese speakers. In some cases of noticing, he sought models (as in the case of postcard openings), in some, instruction combined with social language use (as in the case of conditionals in excuses), and in others
observing language use was sufficient for awareness. In 1995, Schmidt paraphrased the noticing hypothesis as “what learners notice in input is what becomes intake for learning” (Schmidt, 1995: 20). Schmidt (2010) further observes, “My proposal is that noticing is necessary for SLA, and that understanding is facilitative but not required” (Schmidt, 2010, online; no pagination).

Accounts of second language acquisition of pragmatics were open to a role for awareness because contemporary theories of second language acquisition did not address pragmatics. Nor could they explain the observed pattern of acquisition: learners who were highly proficient grammatically could be infelicitous pragmatically in the second language and culture. Accounts that rested on availability of input and awareness were promising in exploring different rates of development in grammar and pragmatics in the same learner.

The literature dealing with pragmatic awareness can be divided into three categories: pedagogical papers, tests of awareness, and instructional effect studies. Pedagogical recommendations provide explicit operationalization of awareness following Schmidt’s noticing hypothesis. Developmental studies of awareness explore the claims made by the noticing hypothesis by asking what learners notice and whether that could lead to acquisition. Finally, the instructional effect studies (intervention studies) combine pedagogical operationalization of awareness with tests of awareness and/or language production before and after instruction. Each is considered in the following three sections.

**Awareness in Pragmatics Pedagogy**


Pragmatic awareness was seen as a precursor to pragmatic competence, and one which instruction could promote. Thus, the instructional goal was increased awareness, and most of the pedagogical development attended to how this could be done. The construct of pragmatic awareness additionally addressed two issues concerning instruction in pragmatics: coverage and learner subjectivity, discussed in this section.

Building directly on Schmidt’s (1993, 1995) claim that noticing is necessary for SLA, Cenoz (2007) notes that “the development of pragmatic awareness is crucial for the intercultural speaker to be competent at the pragmatic level” (p. 135) and she (as well as others) orders awareness as the first step to pragmatic competence. Tomlinson argued that “pragmatic awareness can be achieved by exposing learners to language in use in such a way that they are guided to invest energy and attention in order to make discoveries for themselves” (p. 119). Discovery is an element of noticing that is present in Schmidt’s accounts of his own pragmatic awareness. Many pedagogical accounts stressed the value of discovery including Tomlinson (1994) and Clennell (1999) who observed that “learners need to feel that they have arrived at their discoveries through their own efforts” (p. 87). In addition to the importance of noticing the input in the awareness-raising approach, one of the main principles was that learners can “profit
from noticing the gaps between how they typically use the target language and how it is used by native speakers” (Tomlinson, 1994: 121).

‘Awareness-raising’ was used in two ways in pragmatics lessons. The first use describes general activities or discussions conducted at the beginning of a lesson to heighten the learners’ awareness of pragmatics and to help them to start thinking about pragmatics and variation (in opposition to grammar and ‘correct answers’). The warm-up phase often makes reference to the first language or encourages learners to do so (see, for example Rose, 1994, 1999; Byon, 2006). Thus, the first round of awareness-raising increases receptivity. Once the students were ‘warmed up,’ awareness-raising activities that engaged input with specific target language features would open the way to acquisition. The second round of awareness-raising addresses sociopragmatic or pragmalinguistic characteristics of the target language. For example, if the instructional goal were to illustrate that some languages favour apologies and others favour thanking in the same context (the end of office hours is one such example), the warm up might include a discussion of what thanking and apologies are and when they are used. The second phase might include examples of thanking or apologies in the target language in office hours, depending on the target language. Expanding this to include pragmalinguistics, the specific forms used in the office-hour closings might be explored.

As much as pragmatic awareness was seen as the first step in the development of L2 pragmatic competence, it was also seen as a learning outcome on its own. By helping learners to develop pragmatic awareness, instructors could help learners develop the ability to learn autonomously. This is important in two areas: learner determination of what features of the target language pragmatics are relevant to them (the identification of personal learning targets); and learner determination of how far to go (learner subjectivity).

Early critics of speech act approaches to pragmatics such as Flowerdew (1990) pointed out that comprehensive instruction of speech acts was not possible. Researcher-teachers countered that cultivating pragmatic awareness was the goal of instruction, not information about specific speech acts. Pragmatic awareness could be used outside the classroom to identify characteristics of interactions that were important to learners, thus fostering learner autonomy (Bardovi-Harlig et al., 1991; Eslami-Rasekh, 2005; Kondo, 2008; Rose, 1994; Tomlinson, 1994). Ishihara also characterizes pragmatic awareness as an instructional goal:

One answer to this overwhelming complexity in teaching pragmatics is the approach taken in the curriculum that L2 educators aim to equip learners with awareness with which they can autonomously improve their pragmatic ability, instead of attempting to comprehensively teach intricate pragmatic norms of the L2.

Ishihara, 2007: 30–31

Thus, the heightening of pragmatic awareness as an instructional goal was seen not only as a precursor to acquisition, but as giving learners a tool to learn target language pragmatics outside classrooms and to select their own targets.

Pragmatic awareness as an instructional goal not only has the advantage of encouraging learners to identify their own pragmatic targets, but it also has the advantage of allowing learners to make informed decisions about whether to pursue L2 pragmatics. Because the use of L2 pragmatic norms involves speakers’ social identity as well as their linguistic competence, it is not surprising that the literature reports learner resistance to adopting some L2 pragmatic norms.
(Eslami-Rasekh, 2005; Ishihara, 2007). Eslami-Rasekh (2005) observed that “not all English language learners wish to behave pragmatically just like native speakers of the target language (Washburn 2001). An important issue to be considered by teachers is to acknowledge and respect learners’ individuality and freedom of choice and their systems of values and beliefs” (p. 207). This has come to be known as learner subjectivity. Because pragmatics is linked to social identity, it also involves learners’ own subjective categories including attitudes, perceptions of situations, and affective disposition (Ishihara and Tarone, 2009; Siegal, 1996).

While subjectivity is often thought of as negative, learner agency is a complementary positive force discussed in the work of Kinginger (2008; Kinginger and Farrell, 2004). In these studies, learners who are studying abroad come to see the address term system in French (tu/vous) as a linguistic means of self-presentation. Thus, their own developing pragmatic awareness allows them to make choices about how they relate to others and how they wish to be perceived by their interlocutors.

Early developers of L2 pragmatics pedagogy widely held the position that if instruction could facilitate awareness of L2 pragmatics, learners and nonnative speakers could determine their own degree of adoption. Learners could experiment with whatever construct was being explored in class during instructional periods, ‘trying on’ the L2 pragmatics in class. As early as 1989, teachers with whom we met in our own ESL programme and at TESOL, had a keen sense of learner self-determination when it came to pragmatics (although almost none of the literature cited in this section was published at that time). Their views encouraged us to develop materials that gave learners pragmatic input and information, but that did not demand adoption. It was in this context that our first article on the teaching of pragmatics came to have ‘awareness’ in the title (Bardovi-Harlig et al., 1991). Awareness seemed to be the ideal pedagogical goal. Eisenchlas (2011: 59) summarizes the current position which Thomas had taken as early as 1983 in her seminal work:

The focus is on exposure to, not imitation of, native speakers. Raising learners’ awareness of the pragmatic conventions of the target culture is a crucial first step for acquiring pragmatic competence (Cenoz, 2007; Cohen, 2005), but learners may not need or want to go further in the acquisition path. Awareness raising may be enough to help the learner develop sensitivity towards pragmatic behaviour in the target culture (Cohen, 2005), to prevent misattribution or faulty assessment of other participants’ intentions, and to equip learners to express themselves the way they choose to do so “– rudely, tactfully, or in an elaborately polite manner” (Thomas, 1983: 96).

Eisenchlas, 2011: 59

Pragmatics Awareness Research

Theoretical and pedagogical claims about the role of awareness in the acquisition of L2 pragmatics led to empirical studies of pragmatic awareness. The empirical studies augment the early anecdotal accounts that came from linguists as language learners (e.g. Cohen, 1997; Schmidt, 1993). The empirical research attempted to determine what a more typical population of learners “attend to and notice in language classes and in more naturalistic settings, and what … they fail to notice” (Schmidt 1995: ix).

Studies of awareness are still relatively uncommon in pragmatics research in contrast to production studies (Bardovi-Harlig, 2010; Takahashi 2012b). Empirical studies
of pragmatic awareness have included both learners’ awareness of the target (Félix-Brasdefer, 2008; Garcia, 2004; Koike, 1996; Kinginger, 2008; Kinginger and Farrell, 2004; Sydorenko and Tuason, 2016) and awareness of differences between learner production and the target (Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei, 1998; Niezgoda and Roever, 2001; Schauer, 2006; Takahashi, 2001, 2005a, 2015). Some awareness tasks such as judgement tasks have predetermined targets of noticing (Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei, 1998; Bardovi-Harlig and Griffin, 2005; Koike, 1996; Niezgoda and Roever, 2001; Schauer, 2006) whereas others are more open within pre-specified speech acts (Takahashi, 2005a; Sydorenko and Tuason, 2016). The former type of study asks whether learners are aware of a given pragmatic feature, and the latter asks what learners notice. Targets of noticing have been both pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic.

Pragmalinguistic awareness may result, for example, from noticing how a particular form is used in the realization of a speech act, as in the case of bi-clausal constructions used in requests by native speakers of English (Takahashi, 2015). Sociopragmatic awareness may result from a learner’s noticing that a particular act is performed in a given situation, for example, that an apology may be required as part of a refusal, that an apology may need an explanation (Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei, 1998; Bardovi-Harlig and Griffin, 2005), or that interlocutors may insist that invitees attend an event after they have declined the invitation (Félix-Brasdefer, 2008).

Awareness studies have a range of targets, including those listed below.

- Speech act identification (Koike, 1989; Garcia, 2004)
- Address forms (Kinginger, 2008; Kinginger and Farrell, 2004; Villarreal, 2014)
- Insistence after refusal (Félix-Brasdefer, 2008)
- What learners notice for production in immediately preceding input (Sydorenko and Tuason, 2016).
- Pragmatic infelicities (Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei, 1998; Niezgoda and Roever, 2001; Schauer, 2006) and the repair of pragmatic infelicities (Bardovi-Harlig and Griffin, 2005)

Awareness of L2 Pragmatics

The first set of studies considered here focuses on what learners are aware of in the second language. In one such study, Félix-Brasdefer (2008) tested learners’ awareness of insistence in Latin American Spanish following a refusal of an invitation. Twenty male learners who had lived in Latin America first performed two role plays in which they refused an invitation and their interlocutors responded with several insistence moves. Using audio playback in retrospective verbal reports, Félix-Brasdefer asked learners about the immediately completed interactions and whether they had “noticed any cultural differences with respect to the notion of insistence between the United States and the country [they] had visited in Latin America” (p. 200). 90% of the learners reported that they had become aware of cultural differences in insistence during their time abroad, and 85% (or 17 learners) asserted that Latin Americans were more insistent than Americans, observing that “Ecuadorians would press more than Americans”, and “Venezuelans would be insistent because they want you to go” (p. 205). But when asked about whether they expected insistence to be directed at them during the role-play interaction, only 20% (or 4 learners) said that “an insistence was expected because it was a
cultural expectation” (p. 205). That means that at least 60% of the learners were aware of insistence from their previous experience and at the same time they did not expect to encounter insistence in the role play, likely resulting from a disjunction between what they have noticed and what is integrated into their interlanguage sociopragmatics.

Koike (1989) and Garcia (2004) investigated whether learners were aware of what speech acts were being performed. Both used aural listening tests with a four-way multiple choice list from which respondents could identify the illocutionary force. In addition to the identification task, Koike (1989) also asked learners to give the cues that they used in speech act identification, or “elements which helped them understand the message” (p. 282). Koike reported that second semester students in beginning Spanish were able to identify a request, a command, and an apology at above 95% accuracy. An expanded study was conducted in English by Garcia (2004). Garcia used 12 items asking for identification of four speech acts: suggestions, corrections, requests, and offers. Lower proficiency learners were less able to identify the speech acts than were higher proficiency learners (who were no different from native speakers of English). Koike (1996) investigated whether learners of Spanish at different levels of proficiency could identify negative questions as suggestions, roughly the equivalent in force to the English positive question. In contrast to the more transparent set of speech acts investigated by Koike (1989) and Garcia (2004), awareness that negative questions functioned as suggestions came very late, and even advanced learners identified the speech act correctly only 50% of the time.

Another set of studies has investigated learners’ awareness of address forms in French (Kinginger, 2008; Kinginger and Farrell, 2004) and Spanish (Villarreal, 2014). Because address terms have relatively simple form, the focus of awareness studies is on whether learners understand how and in what context address terms are used. Because these studies use interviews and retrospective recalls to study awareness, the designs go beyond testing what learners notice and instead elicit explicit statements of form-use associations that reveal what learners have worked out about the address system. Working with students who were studying abroad, Kinginger (2008; Kinginger and Farrell, 2004) conducted a language awareness interview at the outset and completion of the study abroad period. The language awareness interview included six sections, each of which asked the learners to make a decision about language use and to reflect on their choice. The section of particular relevance to pragmatics is the ‘address form situations’ in which participants selected an appropriate address form (tu or vous) in a series of six imagined interpersonal situations (called scenarios in pragmatic research) that involved speakers of different status, solidarity, and deference; some situations were transparent, and some more challenging, such as addressing a same-age bakery employee. In addition, learners kept bi-weekly journals and logbooks. Twenty-three learners were asked to respond to a range of interpersonal situations, select an appropriate address form for different interlocutors, and reflect aloud on the justification for this choice, thereby providing an immediate retrospection for each choice. Learners were asked whether they would use tu or vous in each situation. The pretest showed that many learners began their study abroad experience with the vous-form as the default politeness marker, and came to understand the tu-form as a marker of age-peer solidarity. They also gained agency and advanced speakers learned that they might choose their address forms according to their desired social identity.

Villarreal (2014) tested 14 second-year students of Spanish studying at their home institution. Using a similar questionnaire to Kinginger’s, Villarreal’s learners discussed
six scenarios, and selected from four preset choices, ‘only *usted*’, ‘mostly *usted* but sometimes *tú*’, ‘mostly *tú* but sometimes *usted*’, and ‘only *tú*’. In their interviews, learners’ explanations indicated that they were aware of the potential for the use of address terms “to define and constitute social relationships, as well as their own L2 identities, in discourse” (p. 12). As Villarreal noted, identity construction for this group did not rely on awareness of L2 norms, in contrast to Kinginger’s study abroad learners. (Recall that this group did not have the benefit of going abroad.)

The studies by Félix-Brasdefer (2008) and Kinginger (2008; Kinginger and Farrell, 2004) show that both sets of learners, although different, came to the task with previous awareness and expectations, and in the course of their encounters, noticed something new, arriving at a new awareness. The learners in Félix-Brasdefer’s study had already become aware of the insistence patterns of Latin American Spanish speakers, but were surprised to encounter them in a refusal role play. Kinginger’s learners came to the study abroad event with instructed knowledge of the pronoun system, having explicit knowledge of a system based on familiarity, and through contact and interaction came to be aware of a system defined by age and potential solidarity. What we see here is awareness with discovery, which was one of the themes of the early pedagogical writing. In the Kinginger accounts, the learners revised what they knew. In the Félix-Brasdefer study, the learners did not carry over knowledge of what they had encountered to expectations for themselves. Both accounts show that pragmatic awareness is not static, but accommodates experience. How that impacts second language acquisition is a topic for further research.

**Awareness of Differences in Interlanguage and Target Pragmatics**

Awareness of differences in interlanguage and target pragmatics requires awareness of target pragmatics, which the studies just reviewed suggest learners are able to develop, and it also requires awareness of either what they themselves say (awareness of their interlanguage), of L1, or other pragmatic systems. One set of studies investigated the awareness of differences in the production of other learners and the target language (Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei, 1998, and replications thereof) and another also gave learners transcripts of their own production and others’ to compare to target language production (Takahashi, 2005a, 2015).

Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei (1998) focused exclusively on awareness in the sense of noticing. The replications of the study (Niezgoda and Roever, 2001; Schauer, 2006) added components that also investigated noticing with understanding. Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei compared learners’ (and teachers’) ability to notice utterances that were grammatical but infelicitous to their ability to notice utterances that were ungrammatical but pragmatically felicitous (and these were compared to utterances that were both grammatical and felicitous).

A video judgement task was created for the study so that learners could see and hear the conversational context (available from IRIS, www.iris-database.org/iris/app/home/index). The learners received a paper scoring sheet on which the last utterance of the conversation was printed. They rated the items in a binary decision as good or bad and if bad, they used a five-point scale to rate the utterance from ‘Not bad at all’ to ‘Very bad’. The pragmatic infelicities included sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic mismatches such as overly polite requests at a snack bar, or an ‘I want’ statement in a request addressed to an instructor, or a missing explanation in a refusal. 543 students...
completed the task (370 EFL and 173 ESL), with an additional 112 Italian EFL teachers who had relatively low English proficiency, and 53 teachers who were highly proficient English speakers (both NNS and NS). The original task showed that learners could identify pragmatic infelicities, and that they were much better at doing so at higher proficiency or in the host (or study abroad) environment than in the foreign (or home) environment. Both of the decisions in this task (binary good/bad rating, and subsequent Likert rating) could be done by what Ellis and colleagues call ‘feel’ (Ellis, 2004; Ellis et al., 2009).

The replications of this study, Niezgoda and Roever (2001) and Schauer (2006), tested these findings in two ways: the learners’ ability to distinguish the pragmatic from the grammatical items and the effect of environment. (I focus on the former here.) The replications explored awareness beyond noticing in order to investigate whether the original ratings reflected true pragmatic judgements for the infelicitous utterances and grammatical judgements for the ungrammatical utterances. Niezgoda and Roever trained a subset of 15 respondents to distinguish pragmatic infelicities from grammatical errors; the learners then viewed the video a second time, and categorized the problematic examples in the original test as ‘pragmatic’ or ‘grammatical’. This second categorization task confirmed that learners had responded to the items as intended.

The semi-structured post hoc interviews in Schauer (2006) also confirmed the original interpretation.\(^2\) Students were first told how they had responded on the questionnaire and were asked either what they had perceived the problem to be or what they did not like about the target utterance. Most ungrammaticalities and infelicities were correctly identified; incorrectly identified items were subtracted from the scores to form the corrected score. The corrected scores reflected the findings of the original study. The results from the replications confirm that learners possess pragmatic awareness that allows them to recognize pragmatic infelicity and that they can do this by feel (Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei, 1998), with training (Niezgoda and Roever, 2001), and when asked to articulate their reasoning (Schauer, 2006).

The final activity in this series of reports asked learners to repair the infelicitous scenarios (Bardovi-Harlig and Griffin, 2005). Learners viewed the original video with an answer sheet, participated in a class discussion, and then received transcripts of the scenarios that included the pragmatically infelicitous utterances. Thus, this follow-up study differs from the previous three in that learners were told that there were ‘problems’ in each of the transcripts, but they were not told what they were. Students worked in groups to plan the corrections and act out their role plays in front of the whole class. Like the replications, this classroom activity also asked learners to demonstrate awareness of the infelicities and to correct them. Through their changes to the transcripts in the role plays, learners demonstrated awareness of inappropriate speech acts and lack of or misuse of semantic formulas, but they were less able to correct form.\(^3\) The correction data does not distinguish between noticing the target and noticing the difference between the interlanguage and target pragmalinguistics; in other words, the absence of a repair could have equally resulted from learners not noticing pragmalinguistic issues or from their not knowing how to fix them.

Takahashi’s series of investigations has contributed significantly to our understanding of pragmatic awareness and how to study it. Takahashi designed a series of experiments to investigate awareness at the pragmalinguistic level, examining whether Japanese learners of English notice bi-clausal request forms. These studies are innovative in that they include groups that had the opportunity to compare their own production of
requests to that of native speakers and groups that compared (other) learner production to native speakers (Takahashi, 2001).

Takahashi (2005a) investigated learners’ attentional allocation in a comparison task in which they compared native- and non-native speakers’ use of request forms and rated their interest in the target. Takahashi followed Schmidt (1990, 1993, 1995, amongst others) by defining noticing as “detection with conscious awareness and subsequent subjective experience” (p. 98). In the study, the concept of awareness or noticing (used interchangeably) was operationalized as the extent to which learners can consciously detect a particular feature as an interesting target for intake.

The 80 students compared native-speaker requesters’ English in role-play transcripts with non-native-speaker requesters’ English in the same situations. They wrote down the native-speaker expressions that differed from the non-native-speaker English expressions with relevant comments on the native-speaker English. Learners rated their interest in three bi-clausal request forms (“I was wondering, is it possible to VP?”/“Do you think you could VP?”, and “If you could VP”) and three non-request features (discourse markers, idiomatic expressions, and non-idiomatic expressions). The learners’ degree of awareness was assessed on a seven-point scale:

-3 = I did not detect it at all (and thus was not interested in it at all).
-2 = I did detect it but was hardly interested in it.
-1 = I did detect it but was not so interested in it.
0 = I did detect it, but cannot say whether I was interested in it or not.
+1 = I did detect it and was a little interested in it.
+2 = I did detect it and was interested in it.
+3 = I did detect it and was very interested in it.

Not everything was noticed equally. There was a ranked order among elements investigated: discourse markers were most noticed (and interesting), followed by idiomatic expressions; request forms “I was wondering if you could VP” came next, followed by “Is it possible to VP?”/“Do you think you could VP?” and non-idiomatic expressions, with “If you could VP” receiving a negative awareness rating. Takahashi reported that the learners’ analytic abilities for examining language structures appear to play a role in noticing the complex request head acts, and that pragmalinguistic awareness is associated with the learners’ intrinsic motivation.

In a second series of studies, Takahashi (2012a, 2013, 2015) used oral production tasks and an audio-visual dictation task to investigate what learners were able to notice by comparing their responses to aural input with the intervening step of a dictation task. This more closely approximates the task of learners who engage in conversations with more expert speakers and have aural input, but no transcripts. Building on her earlier work in which she operationalized subjective experience as learners’ interest in the targets, Takahashi (2015) operationalized conscious detection by assessing learners’ ability to detect targets in the input. In 2015 she offered the following definition of awareness:

Awareness = learners’ interest in the attentional targets + learners’ detection capacity for the targets.

Takahashi, 2015: 51

‘Detection capacity’ measured the dictation performance of the target request forms recognized by the learners as normative with respect to their own nontargetlike form.
In this study, learners completed a video dictation task and then compared the production on the video to their own production in response to the same four DCT scenarios. The task was quite elaborated, including listening to the dialogs and searching for any interesting expressions (open-ended noticing), followed by three cycles of noticing-the-gap activities over three weeks in which learners were to record interesting expressions used by the NS speakers that they themselves had not used. Learners also rated their degree of interest in the expressions as they had in Takahashi (2005a) and in addition prepared an awareness journal for each of the three forms in the video dictation tasks (Journals 1–3). The participants were asked to write down their learning goals immediately before the video-dictation tasks and then indicate what they had learned and/or realized in their dictation activities immediately after these tasks.

Analysis of the awareness scores suggests that listening proficiency and communicative interaction may be involved in pragmatic awareness. Self-reflection data suggest that a combination of relatively high listening competence and motivation seems to provide favorable conditions for pragmatic awareness, particularly of the bi-clausal request forms, including discourse markers and some linguistic features. Takahashi’s innovations in design increased the naturalness of the learning situation. Learners were given time to develop awareness over a span of three weeks, and the aural input was similar to how the learners in study abroad settings would have encountered their input. The aural task also replicated the challenges of conversational input. Incorporating such challenges into experimental design is crucial to simulate learning from interaction.

Similar to the approach taken by Takahashi, Sydorenko and Tuason (2016) gave learners the opportunity to compare their own production to native speakers’ production. The comparison took place in real time during a role play and was instigated by asking the learners to “pay attention to specific words, phrases, behaviors, and statements” used by native-speaking students that they would want to use later in a similar situation. Five learners and nine native speakers completed two repeated cycles of request exchanges (focusing on asking a friend to help them move) in a carousel task in which partners first exchanged roles (learner requested first, then native speaker) and then changed partners. Each participant performed each of the two roles in the scenario three times, with three different partners. The production task was supplemented by learners’ notes and semi-structured interviews, which included stimulated recall protocols. The targets were not predetermined (other than being aspects of realizing a request), and what learners noticed was operationalized as a) initially absent in a learner’s performance, b) present in the NS production and different from the learner’s production, and c) subsequently present in the learner’s production.

In real-time noticing and subsequent incorporation into request role plays, learners implemented changes in pragmatic strategies (also known as semantic formulas) and level of directness. The very direct speakers became more indirect and the very indirect became more direct. Some learners also seemed to notice and incorporate the ordering of strategies, but only isolated changes in form were produced by learners; three learners made one change each including “May you help me?” realized subsequently as “Can you help me?” Although a small-scale study, Sydorenko and Tuason (2016) also consider the effects of individual differences on noticing (see Takahashi, 2005a, 2015): Proficiency, contact with native speakers, and quality of that interaction were hypothesized to play a role.

The range of tasks used to investigate awareness in L2 pragmatics includes both online noticing such as learners identifying structures of interest while reading transcripts
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(Takahashi, 2001, 2005a) or listening to and/or participating in role plays (Sydorenko and Tuason, 2016; Takahashi, 2015) and the results of awareness (judgements of appropriateness, identification of speech acts, and preparedness for a previously noticed target pragmatic strategy such as insistence). The number of participants influences the use of interviews and verbal reports; not surprisingly, the larger studies do not employ them. In the aggregate, the studies support a role for awareness in the acquisition of second language pragmatics. They also suggest that although awareness may be facilitative of pragmatic development, it may not be sufficient for acquisition, or not sufficient for immediate incorporation into pragmatic competence and hence spontaneous production. Learning takes time. Studies of individuals (Kinginger, 2008; Kinginger and Farrell, 2004; Sydorenko and Tuason, 2016) and studies of larger groups suggest that some learners may be more likely to notice pragmatic features and their use in input, and this suggests a role for instruction which has the potential to provide the same opportunities to learners of different abilities and inclination. Research on the effects of instruction of awareness is considered next.

Instructional Effect Studies

Instructional effect studies test the efficacy of promoting pragmatic awareness to facilitate second language acquisition. The studies combine the principles of second language pedagogy with the research design of awareness studies (discussed in the preceding sections). In so doing, they test a range of pragmatic targets, including, but not limited to, speech acts (namely requests and refusals), pragmatic routines, evidential markers, and address terms. These studies also cover a range of languages including English, French, Japanese, Korean, and Spanish. Instructional effect studies test three different outcomes: the influence of enhancing awareness instructionally on awareness only, on production only, and on both production and awareness. Establishing that instructional activities designed to enhance pragmatic awareness actually do so is crucial in establishing evidence that awareness precedes acquisition. A range of tasks have been used, augmenting the variety found in the pragmatic awareness studies without the instructional component. Tasks include noticing tasks (Takahashi, 2001, 2005b, 2015), awareness and explanations (Alcon Soler, 2007), recognition and comparison tasks (Fukuya and Clark, 2001), a language awareness interview plus appropriateness judgements (Tateyama, 2007), and acceptability ratings (Martínez Flor and Alcón Soler, 2007; van Compernolle and Kinginger, 2013). The studies that test production alone (e.g. Halenko and Jones, 2011; Nguyen et al., 2013) assume the link between noticing and acquisition, whereas the studies that test both production and awareness attempt to establish both the noticing stage and the learning stage and generally combine a production task such as a role play, oral DCT, or written DCT with an awareness task such as a verbal report (Alcón-Soler, 2012; Alcón-Soler and Guzmán-Pitarch, 2010), an identification and interpretation task (Alcón-Soler 2005), a metapragmatic task (Narita, 2012), or discussions (Kondo, 2008). In general, studies conclude that learners who receive instruction show greater improvement than learners who do not.

With the possible exception of the studies that exclusively investigate the effect of instructional noticing activities on pragmatic awareness, it is difficult to establish a unique causal relationship between increased pragmatic awareness and improvement from pre-tests to post-tests because many of the studies include production opportunities in addition to noticing opportunities. Even some noticing studies include production
practice. Thus, the most we can say of the studies in this section is that pragmatic awareness contributes to pragmatic gains.

These studies reveal unequivocally the extent to which the concept of pragmatic awareness has been embraced in L2 pragmatics pedagogy. ‘Pragmatic awareness’ and ‘pragmatic awareness-raising’ are almost brand names in teaching pragmatics, and like other brand names, such as Kleenex and Xerox, have come to be associated with a wider range of referents than the original. A review of instructional research shows that the term ‘pragmatic awareness’ has expanded to overtly include explicit knowledge. This is reflected in the definition proposed by Alcón and Safont Jordà in their review of pragmatic awareness:

Pragmatic awareness is the conscious reflective, explicit knowledge about pragmatics. It thus involves knowledge of those rules and conventions underlying appropriate language use in particular communicative situations and on the part of members of specific speech communities.

Alcón and Safont Jordà, 2008: 193

This definition is closer to the definition of language awareness offered by the Association of Language Awareness defined as “explicit knowledge about language, and conscious perception and sensitivity in language learning” (www.languageawareness.org/web.alaa/web/about/tout.php) than the definition of awareness found in the early pragmatics literature.

The instructional effect studies reflect a divide between pragmatic awareness as noticing and discovery (or as resulting from noticing and discovery, which was discussed earlier) and pragmatic awareness that results from being given metapragmatic information. The former pragmatic awareness-raising as noticing and discovery are often referred to as ‘implicit approaches’ and the latter, with metapragmatic information, as ‘explicit approaches’. These differences are not always easy to tease apart because all studies provide input (although quality differs, Bardovi-Harlig, 2015), and consciousness-raising (i.e. implicit) conditions may also include metapragmatic information (e.g. Kondo, 2008; Narita, 2012; Nguyen et al., 2013; Tateyama, 2007). Evaluating the expansion of the term ‘pragmatic awareness’ is outside the goal of this chapter; however, Sharwood Smith (on whose work pragmatic consciousness-raising was based) argued that the presentation of rules is a type of consciousness-raising and input enhancement.

As suggested elsewhere, considering the transition from implicit to explicit as a continuum rather than a binary opposition would be fruitful, especially in the domain of facilitating pragmatic awareness (Bardovi-Harlig, 2017). Between the independent learner-driven noticing of pragmalinguistic forms and their use and teacher-given metapragmatic information are a range of possible activities including focused noticing in which learners are directed to consider a specific feature. One example of focused noticing is found in activities that lead learners to notice the distribution of conventional expressions (Bardovi-Harlig and Vellenga, 2012). In conjunction with learning conventional expressions, such as ‘Sorry I’m late’ learners were directed to consider the timing of the expression. Presented with three excerpted transcripts from Friends, learners were asked when the expression occurred. Using stage directions such as ((enters)) and speech cues such as “Hi, sorry I’m late”, learners could determine that ‘Sorry I’m late’ occurs early in the conversation and may be part of the greeting. Although
the learner’s attention is focused by the questions, the learner has the opportunity for discovery in contrast to the alternative of having the teacher state the distributional tendency with examples. In this illustration, both conditions have the same evidence, thus making awareness difficult to separate from input. This is further confounded when the full context of instruction with practice, feedback, and quality of input is considered.

The Future of Awareness Research in Pragmatics

As the reader can see, the history of pragmatic awareness shows that theory, research, and pedagogy have been closely related throughout the life of second language pragmatics. This integration has been nurtured by the many researchers who have undertaken pragmatic instructional studies as an extension of the theoretical work; inducing awareness is often done with the goal of observing the acquisitional outcome.

Because the noticing hypothesis assigns pragmatic awareness a crucial role in the acquisition of pragmatics, researchers will continue to investigate it. In addition to further elaboration of tasks already used to explore pragmatic awareness, there will likely be a role for additional means that are being used in other areas of SLA research such as confidence ratings and source attributions (Rebuschat, 2013). Confidence ratings (e.g. guess, somewhat confident, very confident) and source attributions in which respondents report the basis of their judgement (e.g. guess, intuition, memory, rule) may help illuminate what learners know about L2 pragmatics and how they know it. As interest in pragmatics pedagogy grows, understanding how instruction interacts with L2 pragmatic competence, alongside language contact, environment, and proficiency will further increase interest in the role of pragmatic awareness.

Related Topics

Pragmatic competence; acquisition of second language pragmatics; the noticing hypothesis; verbal reports in pragmatics

Notes

1 The studies included here discuss pragmatic awareness. Those specifically focusing on metapragmatic awareness were not included.

2 Schauer (2006) gave the learners more written information on the answer sheet than the original study did. The original study gave only the final utterance, whereas Schauer also gave the preceding turn. This means that learners would not have had to watch the video but could have read the answer sheet and answered without watching.

3 This was consistent with longitudinal production data (Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford, 1993).

References


