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29

## Pragmatic Awareness in Intercultural Language Learning

Troy McConachy

### 29.1 Introduction

The notion of pragmatic awareness has been a part of the discourse of second language learning for several decades now, having first emerged within the field of interlanguage pragmatics. Initially understood from a primarily cognitive perspective as the learner's ability to "notice" and "understand" the norms of language use in terms of mappings between form, function, and context (e.g. Schmidt 1993), pragmatic awareness has subsequently come to be theorized and researched from a number of additional theoretical perspectives, including sociocultural theory (e.g. van Compernelle 2014) and intercultural language learning (Liddicoat 2006, 2017; McConachy 2013, 2018, 2019; McConachy and Liddicoat 2016; Liddicoat and McConachy 2019). This chapter focuses primarily on the notion of pragmatic awareness as understood and applied within the field of intercultural language learning. Understandings of pragmatic awareness within intercultural language learning have evolved to incorporate several important insights from the field of intercultural pragmatics. Firstly, sociocultural

perspectives within intercultural pragmatics have helped elaborate the pragmatics–culture interface through the notion of “the moral order” (Kádár and Haugh 2013; Spencer-Oatey and Kádár 2016, 2021). Secondly, socio-cognitive perspectives within intercultural pragmatics have helped foreground the role of existing cultural schema and pragmatic knowledge in producing and understanding the pragmatics of a second language (Kecskes 2014). Meanwhile, empirical studies within intercultural language learning have also helped elaborate the role of cognitive architecture in shaping how learners interpret and use second language pragmatic features in context and, thus, such research also contributes to the field of intercultural pragmatics. This chapter critically examines the notion of pragmatic awareness and the mutually enhancing relationship between intercultural pragmatics and intercultural language learning, addressing key theoretical insights and empirical studies.

## **29.2 Theoretical Foundations**

### **29.2.1 Pragmatic Awareness within Interlanguage Pragmatics and Sociocultural Theory**

In order to contextualize understandings of pragmatic awareness that have emerged within the field of intercultural language learning, it is necessary to provide an overview of other dominant conceptions of pragmatic awareness within the broad field of second language pragmatics, specifically those located within the interlanguage paradigm (ILP) and those situated within the perspective of sociocultural theory (SCT).

As introduced above, the notion of pragmatic awareness began to gain attention in the field of interlanguage pragmatics with the application of Schmidt’s (1993)

noticing hypothesis to the domain of pragmatics. Important to point out here is that views of language learning at the time were heavily influenced both by relatively structuralist views of language and by the assumption that a learner's linguistic system was in a process of structural development on its way to resembling that of a native speaker, as embodied in Selinker's (1972) notion of "interlanguage." Interlanguage pragmatics aimed to expand the scope of SLA by drawing attention to language use in context and the learners' acquisition of the ability to produce and comprehend pragmatic meaning (Kasper and Dahl 1991). In so doing, it retained the focus on acquisition of the pragmatic norms of native speakers and turned its attention to the role that awareness might play in facilitating acquisition. In Schmidt's (1993) application of his "noticing hypothesis" to the pragmatic domain, he puts forward a view of language as a system of correspondences between form, function, and contextual variables. Based on this conception, pragmatic awareness is associated with the ability to allocate sufficient attentional resources to detect patterns in input (noticing) and derive from this input an understanding of underlying principles governing the co-occurrence of pragmatic forms, functions, and contextual variables (understanding). Schmidt (1995: 30) gives the example below:

In pragmatics, 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 the co-occurrence with elements of context such as social distance, power, level of imposition and so on, are all matters of understanding.

Here, thus, pragmatic awareness would entail coming to notice and understand the pragmalinguistic realization patterns used for achieving the request (*could you look at this problem?*), recognize the intended pragmatic effects of the use of alerters (*I'm terribly sorry to bother you*) and downgraders (*if you have time*) and identify the sociopragmatic variables that are likely to have influenced pragmatic selection, such as power (P), distance (D), and R (rank/weight of imposition). This conception of pragmatic awareness assumes that triadic mappings between form, function, and context are stable and consistent enough within a language or language variety to be identified as “norms” and that it is these norms that constitute the “object” of pragmatic awareness (the phenomenon toward which awareness extends). In other words, pragmatic awareness is constituted by the application of attentional capacities and powers of induction to arrive at recognition of rules underlying patterns of language use in context.

A significant amount of research has implicitly or explicitly adopted Schmidt's understanding of pragmatic awareness to investigate the relative effectiveness of developing learners of pragmatic norms through pedagogical strategies that focus more on explicit metapragmatic explanation and those that target implicit learning mechanisms such as input enhancement and consciousness-raising tasks (see chapters in Taguchi 2019 for recent overviews). Whilst a review of these studies is not within the purview of this chapter, it is worth pointing out that studies appear to confirm the effectiveness of explicit learning over implicit learning when it comes to acquiring L2 pragmatic norms (Taguchi 2015). It should be mentioned here that the effectiveness of pragmatic awareness raising is often inferred from changes in learners' perception

and/or use of pragmatic features that more closely resemble what has been introduced as normative according to native-speaker standards.

Within the theoretical perspective of SCT, pragmatic awareness is understood less in terms of the learner's ability to notice and understand pragmatic norms of appropriateness in a narrow sense and more in terms of the acquisition of conceptual understandings that enable reflective and creative decision making (see [Morollón Martí and Fernández 2014](#); [van Compernelle 2014](#); [Henery 2015](#); [van Compernelle et al. 2016](#)). This reflects the fundamental view within SCT that learning is a process of appropriating mental tools for perceiving and acting on the world rather than a process of information transfer. Whereas dominant views of pragmatic awareness and much empirical research on the development of awareness within interlanguage pragmatics has tended to place emphasis on pragmalinguistic awareness over sociopragmatic awareness, this is inverted within the SCT perspective ([van Compernelle 2014](#)).

In fact, authors such as [van Compernelle \(2014\)](#) have criticized the overreliance on rules of thumb that naively map the rules governing combinations of forms, functions, and contextual variables. Within the SCT perspective, pragmatic awareness entails a reflective understanding of important sociopragmatic concepts such as politeness, power, social distance, formality, and an ability to consider a range of possible ways to create interpersonal effects based on explicit consideration of these notions. This allows learners to think about the possibilities for enacting pragmatic meanings beyond the scope of pragmatic rules of thumb. It is theorized that anchoring pragmatic awareness in reflective and analytical understanding of sociopragmatic concepts helps learners cultivate a broader view of interaction as fundamentally contingent upon the decision-making and mutual negotiation of interactants and of

themselves as agentive communicators (van Compernelle and Williams 2012; van Compernelle 2014).

One observation necessary at this point with respect to the theoretical perspectives on pragmatic awareness above is that awareness is primarily oriented toward the pragmatic norms of the L2. This does not necessarily mean that instructional practices fail to incorporate reflection on learners' L1. In fact, the usefulness of encouraging crosslinguistic comparison as a way of developing pragmatic awareness is frequently mentioned in the pedagogical literature (e.g. Bardovi-Harlig 1996; Eslami-Rasekh 2005; Ishihara and Cohen 2014) and incorporated into some empirical studies on L2 pragmatic acquisition (e.g. Félix-Brasdefer 2008). Research on third language acquisition has also highlighted the potential for bidirectional influence and synergy among the pragmatic features of languages within a learners' repertoire (e.g. Cenoz 2008; Portoles 2015). However, there is currently little systematic theorization that deals with the role of learners' L1-related pragmatic awareness or interactions between pragmatic awareness of different languages in the learning process through a multilingual lens. Although a shift appears to be underway within interlanguage pragmatics in terms of increasing recognition of the need to adopt a multilingual perspective on learning (Taguchi and Roever 2017; Nightingale and Safont 2019), there is more room for explicit theorization of the ways that learners' culturally derived understandings of the social world interface with their perception and use of the languages within their emerging communicative repertoire. This requires more explicit engagement with the notion of culture and consideration of the ways in which attentional and interpretive processes are mediated by individuals' existing assumptions about the social and material world (Hinton 2016), which have themselves

been formed through experiences of interacting in the first language and any other additional languages. The SCT perspective on pragmatic awareness has helped foreground the importance of the way learners conceptualize different dimensions of social relations and their agentive capacity for creating pragmatic meanings, but it has not fully incorporated a multilingual perspective that considers how cultural assumptions and affective resonances tied to different languages and learners' own identity impact on the learning process. It is such a perspective that is characteristic of approaches to pragmatic awareness within intercultural language learning, which will be dealt with below.

## **29.2.2 Pragmatic Awareness through an Intercultural Lens**

Within intercultural language learning, the notion of pragmatic awareness has been situated within a dynamic view of learning that emphasizes the learner's engagement in processes of coming to interpret language as an embodiment of cultural meaning, mediating between different understandings of communicative practices and social relations, and decentering from existing cultural assumptions (Liddicoat 2006, 2014, 2017; McConachy 2013, 2018, 2019; McConachy and Liddicoat 2016; Koutlaki and Eslami 2018; Liddicoat and McConachy 2019). These processes are seen as central to the development of learners who are sensitive to the impact of cultural differences on processes of meaning-making and who can interact in an effective and reflective way with individuals from a wide variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Liddicoat and Scarino 2013). Intercultural language learning recognizes that learners and their interlocutors are frequently multilingual (or becoming multilingual), and the learning process thus needs to prepare learners for interactions that are likely to be dynamic,



multilingual, and informed by diverse cultural assumptions about appropriate language use (Leung and Scarino 2016).

Early work on intercultural language learning recognized a close connection between pragmatics and culture and the value of developing learners' awareness of how pragmatic features are linked with cultural meanings and broader worldviews (e.g. Crozet 1996, 2003; Liddicoat and Crozet 2001). This is predicated on a semiotic view of culture as a meaning-making system (c.f. Geertz 1973) and the notion of "linguaculture/linguaculture," which sees culture as something that resides "within" language. That is, language is seen as one of the primary tools by which social groups and individuals give meaning to material and social reality and is thus intertwined with behavioral norms, values, and assumptions. Intercultural language learning has aimed to operationalize learners' awareness of the relationship between pragmatics and culture in a number of different ways. For example, Crozet (1996) offers a framework for identifying areas of language at which the impact of culture on meaning is most salient, including interactional and pragmatic norms. Although she does not refer to "pragmatic awareness" per se, there is a clear focus on developing learners' understanding of cross-cultural differences in specific norms of interaction, including conversational openings and closings, adjacency pairs, feedback tokens, as well as speech act strategies. Here, understanding of cross-cultural differences incorporates recognition of differences in pragmalinguistic realization patterns but goes beyond this to include deeper awareness of the fact that particular speech acts (e.g., thanking) might be conceptualized in different ways and be associated with a different set of social obligations in different languages.

This relativistic perspective takes inspiration from Wierzbicka's work on cross-cultural pragmatics, which highlights that core categories taken for granted in Anglocentric approaches to pragmatics research – including sociopragmatic variables such as “power,” “distance,” or even particular speech act types – are not necessarily culturally universal nor neutral. For example, whereas speech act forms used for “thanking” in the English language might allow a relatively transparent reflection of “gratitude,” speech act forms associated with thanking in some other languages, such as Japanese, might embody the sentiment of being “sorry” (Sugimoto 1998). Thus, it is not just a difference in speech act realization patterns but rather a fundamental difference in emotional content and speech act conceptualization. As Liddicoat (2009) points out, speech act norms tend to reflect the ways that cultural groups construct the social world, including the ways they conceptualize interpersonal roles and relationships and the rights and obligations attached to these relationships. Thus, ways of giving thanks index the (assumedly) shared understanding of these rights and obligations among speakers and thus different conceptions of rights and obligations can lead to different interpretations of the appropriateness of thanking behavior. This is in line with Spencer-Oatey (2008) who highlights those differences in conceptualizing rights and obligations attached to roles and relationships has a significant impact on rapport in intercultural communication.

Within intercultural language learning, it is exploration of the interface between pragmatics and culture that is posited to contribute to growing awareness of the relativity of pragmatic norms and their conceptualization across languages and cultures, and it is this awareness that provides an opportunity for learners to transcend their existing cultural worldview. This necessitates a process by which learners develop their

awareness of pragmatic norms that pertain to the L2 and other languages they speak and consider the basis upon which individuals decide what is appropriate in a given context and why. Learners, thus, experience an inherently analytical and reflective engagement with pragmatics whereby they attempt to consider the potential implications of pragmatic differences within and across languages and cultures at the level of speech act realization (as one example) and the underlying assumptions about the social world that influence judgments of appropriateness (see also Liddicoat, this volume). Given the analytical and reflective nature of learning and the emphasis on conscious understanding of different pragmatic behaviors within a relativistic cultural perspective, the term “metapragmatic awareness” is often utilized over “pragmatic awareness,” defined by McConachy (2013: 03) as “a view of language as a contextually contingent social tool in which individuals orient to pragmatic phenomena based on culturally situated frames of reference.” This means that the aim of learning is not to “know” the pragmatic norms of the L2 in a narrow sense, but to develop a view on language use which recognizes that pragmatic features and behaviors are always interpreted within a cultural context, particularly when judgments of “appropriateness” are invoked.

McConachy (2018) has developed this line of thinking further with his notion of “intercultural perspective on language use.” He explains this as “a flexible lens for approaching the interpretation of language use which enables the individual to be mindful of the ever-present impact of cultural assumptions on how individuals interpret and evaluate each other in interaction.” He argues that the development of an intercultural perspective on language use is underpinned by metapragmatic awareness, which learners develop as they pay close attention to language use in context and

consider the exchange of meanings and evaluations of people that arise from this exchange, gradually developing insight into the different ways that assumptions about interpersonal relationships influence how people interpret what it said. This emphasis on developing learners' awareness of how they **derive** impressions of people based on their interpretations of language use **derives** from insights in the field of intercultural pragmatics, particularly thinking around "the moral order." [Haugh \(2013: 57\)](#) explains that "the moral order is what grounds our evaluations of social actions and meanings as 'good' or 'bad', 'normal' or 'exceptional', 'appropriate' or 'inappropriate' and so on, and of course, as 'polite', 'impolite', 'over-polite' and so on." Thus, this notion has emerged as a way of capturing the intertwined system of norms and values that shape the expectancies that members of cultural groups have toward language use in context and why pragmatic violations often trigger moral emotions and moral judgments (see [Kádár 2020](#); [Spencer-Oatey and Kádár 2021](#)). Whereas interlanguage pragmatics has often focused on how language learners might be (negatively) interpreted by native speakers if their language use diverges from native-speaker norms, [McConachy \(2018\)](#) aims to invert the equation by developing learners' awareness of their own internal normative standards, shaped by their cultural experiences, and the potential for unacknowledged assumptions to lead to ethnocentric judgments of others. This involves an emphasis on learners' experiencing their own cognitive and affective reactions in a more conscious way, particularly when they experience emotional resistance to L2 norms (cf. [Ishihara and Tarone 2009](#)), or strong moral emotions related to language use being in/appropriate in a given context.

This emphasis on exploring the learners' internal world has necessitated elaboration of the cognitive structures that shape pragmatic interpretation. This is

another area that has been served by insights from intercultural pragmatics. [McConachy \(2018\)](#) draws on the socio-cognitive perspective on intercultural pragmatics as articulated by [Kecskes \(2014\)](#), which explains that individuals are continually drawing on cognitive resources such as schema, scripts, presuppositions, and cultural models as the basis for interpreting and constructing meanings. The combination of these elements in the mind, shaped by an individual's social experiences, constitutes an interpretive architecture that influences how individuals perceive communicative situations, people, and normative behavior, including linguistic behavior. Assumptions, conceptualizations, scripts, beliefs, and values associated with a learners' L1 are active in the process of language learning and inevitably influence the interpretive processes by which individuals attempt to map out the affordances for constructing social meanings within the L2 ([Kecskes 2014](#)). An important feature of the socio-cognitive perspective is that there is a move away from the metaphor of "transfer" in understanding the interplay between cognitive resources associated with different languages within the mind of the individual. Rather, languages are seen as existing within an integrated multilingual network in the mind where there is not only bi-directional influence but also the potential for synergy. The specification of these cognitive elements within a multilingual framing of mind provides a way of understanding the building blocks of cognition that underlie the interpretation of language use and broader behavior, as learners bring together knowledge of different languages and cultures within learning.

To sum up, views of (meta)pragmatic awareness within intercultural language learning emphasize the cultural construction of pragmatic norms and meanings and the need for the learner to develop insight into the ways that culturally shaped conceptions

of the social world impact on pragmatic interpretation and use. It is important to point out that awareness of L2 pragmatic norms in terms of the cognitive processes of “noticing” and “understanding” (i.e. as defined by Schmidt) is still acknowledged as one important point of pragmatic awareness development, as is the conceptual understanding of sociopragmatic notions such as “formality” and “distance” emphasized within work in the SCT perspective. What is characteristic of the theoretical perspectives on (meta)pragmatic awareness within intercultural language learning is the inherently multilingual and intercultural framing of learning and the expanded ontology of language and awareness itself. Language is seen as a culturally embedded meaning-making system in the sense that interpretations and evaluations of language use require recourse to underlying assumptions about social relations and notions of appropriate behavior. Thus, awareness itself needs to extend to these deeper elements which provide the cognitive context within which language use and people are evaluated. The [next section](#) explores empirical studies that have been carried out in line with this conception.

## 29.3 Empirical Studies

Empirical research on L2 pragmatics learning theorized through an intercultural lens has surfaced mainly in the last ten–fifteen years (e.g. Liddicoat 2006, 2017; Warner 2012; Kecskes 2014; Haugh and Chang 2015; McConachy and Liddicoat 2016, Forthcoming; McConachy 2018, 2019; Liddicoat and McConachy 2019). Such work has devoted much attention to the ways that learners construct understandings of pragmatic phenomena while reflecting on how cultural frames of reference and assumptions influence the interpretation of language use in context and the evaluation

of speakers. This has included a focus on a variety of phenomena in spoken and written pragmatics, including perceptions of personal pronouns, conversational routines, speech acts, role relations, politeness, genre, and more. The review of empirical studies below will be selective in order to go into depth concerning theoretical orientation and the significance of findings.

In an early study looking at L2 pragmatics learning within an intercultural framing, Liddicoat (2006) examined how a group of Australian learners of L2 French came to adopt more complex understandings of the sociocultural meanings of second person pronouns *tu* and *vous* that went beyond the rules of thumb presented in textbooks. Since textbooks tend to map these pronouns onto notions of “informality” and “formality” respectively in relatively simplistic ways (cf. van Compernelle 2014), learners in this study were given opportunities to consciously consider the extent to which metapragmatic rules of thumb applied to a wide variety of samples of authentic discourse on three occasions within an eight-week period, with the intent that learners would come to recognize complexity. Data collected through pre-course interviews, written reflections, and a post-course interview showed that learners did demonstrate a shift in perception in terms of coming to appreciate the situated and contingent nature of pragmatic choices and the negotiated nature of social relationships. Sample understandings from initial interviews are reproduced in modified form below.

### Extract 1

S2: *Tu* is informal and *vous* is formal, so I suppose if you're doing something formal you would use *vous*.

S9: It says in the book that you use *vous* when you're being polite, so you'd probably use it when you ask for something.

(Liddicoat 2006: 67)

Here, learners' understandings essentially mirror textbook rules of thumb whereby forms are differentiated in terms of seemingly polar categories such as formal/informal or polite/impolite. Data from later in the course show that learners moved away from static conceptions of form-meaning correspondences to see personal pronouns more in terms of contextually contingent interpersonal resources. In the process, they increasingly reflected on person reference in Australian English and began to explore different assumptions about interpersonal relationships.

### Extract 2

S3: I've got more aware now. I listen to see if they say *tu* or *vous* or if they use names. Then I know something about how they feel about each other. It adds so much to what you hear when you're watching a film. I still need to read the subtitles, but now I hear things that aren't there in English and I know so much more.

S3: I learnt that people sometimes change from *vous* to *tu*. That may be something pretty special – like you cross a barrier or something and you have this whole new relationship. It's something that you can't do in English, so it means you can't show the way something changes. If people call each other *tu* straightaway they've sort of lost this. I think that's a pity.

(Liddicoat 2006: 72)

Through a systematic process of reflecting on pragmatic meanings, learners came to consider the implications of having different linguistic options available for



indexing closeness or formality in interpersonal relations. Learners' pragmatic awareness, thus, came to accommodate a view of personal pronouns as having indexical potential that went beyond rules of thumb and which recognized the role of speaker agency in creating interpersonal closeness/distance through pragmatic choices. Importantly, from an intercultural perspective, this study showed that shifting the learners' focus from "forms" to "choices" was an important part of acknowledging complexity, which in turn created the possibility for more nuanced crosslinguistic comparisons and a willingness to decenter from default assumptions in order to construe pragmatic choices and interpersonal relationships within a different cultural logic.

Whilst Liddicoat's study looked at the development of understandings in relation to indexical meaning associated with pronouns, some other studies have focused more on speech acts. [McConachy \(2018\)](#) carried out a case study with a small group of Japanese learners of English which explored the relationship between metapragmatic awareness and intercultural learning by looking at learners' reflective understandings in relation to a number of conversational routines and speech acts. This involved a ten-week intervention whereby adult learners were exposed to a range of resources including textbooks, teacher-made materials, and authentic language samples, and were guided through analytical and reflective engagement with speech acts such as requests, apologies, and compliments, as well as conversational routines involving talk about the weekend. This study examined the development of metapragmatic awareness largely within the context of collaborative discussions, thus helping to illuminate the close relationship between classroom talk and the emergence of more analytical and reflective understandings of pragmatic features and meanings across languages and

cultures. Learning is analyzed within the framework of intercultural language learning practices proposed by Liddicoat and Scarino (2013), which posits a key role for noticing, comparing, reflecting, and interacting.

The study brought about a number of insights regarding the nature of metapragmatic awareness, particularly in relation to reflexive dimensions of awareness and the ways that classroom talk contributes to the process of problematizing existing assumptions about pragmatic norms and the interface with social identities. The data showed that the process of reflecting on various language samples and interactional incidents helped learners articulate their assumptions relating to appropriate pragmatic behavior, many of which learners themselves perceived to be rooted in cultural norms and values within Japanese society. McConachy (2018: 92) identifies a particularly important role for “experience talk,” which he defines as “descriptive, evaluative, and explanatory accounts of interactional experiences that are collaboratively constructed amongst classroom participants on the basis of reflection.” This talk will be illustrated in the extract below.

### **Extract 3**

In this extract, two Japanese students of English are discussing their experiences and perceptions of customer service in the United States and Japan. Misato is a female postgraduate student in Japan who has studied English for many years but has only visited English-speaking countries for short periods of time as a tourist. Tai is a male undergraduate student majoring in tourism at a Japanese university. His father lives in the USA, and he has thus visited there many times for short periods of time.

1. Teacher : Okay, so let me ask you: how have you felt when you've been travelling overseas, and the shop staff have spoken to you in a different way than in Japan?
2. Misato: So, when I went to San Francisco the staff asked me, "Where did you come from, Tokyo or Osaka?" I said, "I from Osaka," and last he asked me to shake hands.
3. Tai: Weird
4. Misato: Yeah, at last I feel a little strange. So because he asked me many things.
5. Tai: Yeah, I think maybe he was too friendly.
6. Misato: And it because I foreigner and tourist so maybe he was too friendly, I think.
7. Tai: Ah, but I think the relationship between customer and staff is equal in ... .
8. Misato: Abroad?
9. Tai: Abroad? Yeah, I don't know about that, but maybe Western.
10. Teacher: Yeah, that's an interesting point. I actually feel like sometimes the shop staff are up here and the customer is down here. Sometimes in Australia you are friendly to them, but they are not so friendly to you. It's kind of reversed.
11. Misato: I think it's because in Japan, there is the concept of "*okyakusama wa kamisama*" (The customer is a God). So many customers are arrogant, I think.
12. Tai: Ah, but this idea "Customer is God" was not natural in Japan because I learned that in tourism class. One hotel manager thought up have this idea and ordered his staff, "Don't be rude to customer." Until then, the staff say something impolite to customer like, "This is not my job." But now, even some job is not staff's job, they do it.

(McConachy 2018: 108)

Here, the students start from a relatively broad frame of comparison where the focus of reflection is on their experiences of (perceived) differences of customer-service interactions in Japan and the USA, which is most salient given the travel experiences of these two students. The focus is introduced by Misato in line 2 with a descriptive

account of a short exchange between herself and a salesclerk in San Francisco. There is a shift in line 3 where Tai responds with an evaluation of “weird,” which Misato orients to in line 4, characterizing the interaction as “strange” and then offering description which serves to support her attribution. The issue appears to be that both students perceive it to be unusual for a salesclerk to ask personal questions to a customer. Tai reframes his assessment slightly by offering an evaluation of “too friendly.” Thus, to this point, the experience talk is focused on description and evaluation. There is a shift in line 7, however, as Misato attempts to interpret the experience with reference to two elements of context: her status as “tourist” and “foreigner.” Rather than seeing the “friendliness” of her interlocutor as a reflection of national culture per se, she is considering that it might be an interactional accommodation to her specifically. It is in the next line (line 7) that Tai attempts to interpret the experience within a more cultural frame, introducing the possibility that role relations in this situation – specifically “customer” and “staff” – may be defined by a relative sense of equality. In lines 7–9, Tai and Misato work to construct a cultural reference point for this interpretation, with Tai suggesting a comparative framing between Japan and “Western.” The teacher contributes to the discussion in line 10 with his observation that sometimes the customer is actually more friendly than service staff in Australia. In line 11, Misato develops a more interpretive frame by considering a key cultural idiom that underpins customer service interaction in Japan – “The customer is a God” – and why customers (presumably, also herself) may not be used to personal interactions with salesclerks. Line 12 shows an interesting turn where Tai reflects on this particular cultural idiom and points out although many people might regard it as reflecting a long-standing cultural consensus, it was actually introduced recently.

Thus, through the interaction, it can be seen that reflection on experience is driven by descriptive, evaluative, interpretive/explanatory accounts through which the learners consider interactional experiences in relation to potentially relevant features of context, culturally salient conceptualizations of role relations and the potential for these to differ across cultures, and the ideological construction of attitudes toward customer service. In terms of metapragmatic awareness, the focus here is not on internalizing an L2 norm but bringing into awareness through conscious articulation the different assumptions about customer service interaction and role relations that inform interpretation of this experience. Processes of interpretation and reflection, which are conducive to the development of metapragmatic awareness, will inevitably bring to the surface stereotypical understandings of self and other, and thus what is key from a learning perspective is that interactional trajectories within classroom talk allow for these to be subject to further (critical) reflection. Also important is that learners have opportunities to tap into underlying assumptions linked to L1 pragmatics. McConachy's (2018) study, which introduced the notion of "intercultural perspective on language use," included notable emphasis on the development of metapragmatic awareness in relation to learners' L1, as illustrated below.

#### **Extract 4**

In the reflective discussion below, the teacher is encouraging Seiji and Tai to reflect on two forms used for thanking in Japanese. The discussion here is essentially oriented towards exploring the "differences" between these two forms, as although both of them can be used for thanking, "sumimasen" is also used for apologizing, which is one of the

reasons that the speech acts of thanking and apologizing often overlap in Japanese discourse (Sugimoto 1998).

- 1.....Teacher: So, just before we were thinking about the differences between “*sumimasen*” for “Thank you” and “*arigatou gozaimashita*”. During the break have you thought about this anymore? What are you thinking Seiji?
- 2.....Seiji: Um, I think its difference comes from hierarchy.
- 3.....Teacher: What kind of hierarchy? Age?
- 4.....Seiji: Yeah, or situation. Like I imagined that if the inferior gave some gifts to superior, superior might say “*arigatou gozaimasu*.” And in contrast, a superior gave something to an inferior, an inferior might say “*sumimasen*.” I just think so. So I think it is because of hierarchy system.
- 5.....Teacher: Okay. So, do you think that they are just saying “I’m sorry” or the feeling is really “I’m sorry”?
- 6.....Seiji: ... ..feeling ... .. um little bit feel sorry because superior is thinking of the inferior. Superior *ga kidukai wo shimeshita* (The superior showed concern/care), so it’s ... . inferior might think ...
- 7.....Teacher: It’s not necessary?
- 8.....Seiji: ... um no ... if I were inferior, I feel I let him to do so. So, it’s little bit impolite.
- 9.....Teacher: So you think it’s connected to the idea of *kidukai*? So basically, you are saying that somebody in a lower position should not make someone in a higher position do *kidukai*. But if they do, then you should say “*sumimasen*”?
- 10.....Seiji: It just my opinion but I think so.
- 11.....Teacher: Could you agree with that Tai?
- 12.....Tai: Yeah, I often do the mistakes when I got the gift. I don’t know this comes from my personality or experience, but when someone give me the gift I say “*arigatou gozaimasu*” most times.

(McConachy 2018: 99-100)

In line 2 of the discussion, Seiji is quick to put forward the idea that the difference between these forms is associated with “hierarchy.” Thus, the immediate focus is on what the use of these forms is likely to index in communication. After being prompted by the teacher to unpack the notion of hierarchy a little, he draws on the

notions of “superior” and “inferior” to represent the vertical dimension of social relations that he sees as relevant. These terms do not have the same connotation of competency as they do in the English language, but rather here represents the idea of “上下関係” (Jyouge kankei – upper and lower relations), which is considered a key conceptual axis in Japanese social relations (e.g. Nakane 1967; Ide 2006). The understanding that Seiji constructs in line 4 is that a speaker in a lower position in the social hierarchy is more restricted in terms of selecting forms to index thanking when having received something from a superior, and that a speaker would be more likely to select “sumimasen.” Thus, here, the expression of Seiji’s metapragmatic awareness relates forms, functions, and context (i.e. hierarchical relations). It is in line 5 that the teacher encourages further reflection on the emotional experience of the speaker using “sumimasen,” specifically whether the speaker would feel “sorry” when thanking after receiving a gift. Seiji believes that this would be the case (lines 6–8), as receiving a gift from a “superior” means that the superior has shown unsolicited “kidukai” (concern/care) toward the inferior and it would be impolite to fail to mark the unexpectedness of this action, which would require use of “sumimasen.” This expression of cultural logic underpinning pragmatic selection is reformulated by the teacher and presented back to Seiji and Tai for confirmation (line 9), which is then confirmed by them (lines 10–12). Interesting, however, is that Tai positions himself as deviant vis-à-vis these norms and underlying cultural ideas due to a tendency to use “arigatou gozaimasu.”

In terms of metapragmatic awareness, it is clear that the expression of metapragmatic awareness that emerges through this reflective discussion goes beyond pragmatic rules of thumb, even though the learners do broadly identify upper or lower

positioning in the social hierarchy as a key contextual variable that would impact on selection of forms. Whilst students do not unpack the precise cultural meaning of the relational categories of “superior” and “inferior” in this extract, they use them to construct a cultural account of thanking practices within which recognition of “kidukai,” relative to social expectancies, is expected to be indexed by the chosen pragmalinguistic form. In other words, the metapragmatic awareness articulated here embodies recognition of linguistic forms, pragmatic functions, and underpinning cultural logic nested in a hierarchical system.

The studies above by [Liddicoat \(2006\)](#) and [McConachy \(2018\)](#) contribute to the empirical elaboration of metapragmatic awareness as a multilingual and intercultural phenomenon and the specific ways that analytical and reflective talk about pragmatic features facilitates the process of awareness development within particular interactional sequences. This particular area of contribution is developed in a recent study by [Savić and Myrset \(Forthcoming\)](#), who look at the metapragmatic awareness of third, fifth, and seventh grade Norwegian learners of English, drawing attention to the role of learners’ assumptions about social relationships and intergroup perceptions on the interpretation of politeness. Given that most research on young learners has tended to elicit metapragmatic awareness within the confines of tightly controlled pragmatic judgment tasks, this study is innovative in the sense that it probed learners’ interpretive understandings of request forms and politeness in an open-ended way and encouraged cross-cultural comparison and reflection. The authors elicited data predominantly through the medium of Norwegian with the use of an original “ranking circle task” which encourages learners to take a bottom-up approach to brainstorming and ranking what is important when making a request in English. Importantly, the researchers took



a dialogic approach to data collection which involved prompting the learners to articulate reasons for their decisions, thus helping reveal the interpretive frames linked to learners' judgments.

The results revealed that even third grade students were aware of the importance of being polite when making a request, not simply in terms of the linguistic construction of the head act but also in terms of taking care with pre-request moves such as greetings. The data appears to reveal that the open-ended nature of the elicitation task helped learners evaluate the broader interpersonal context and the need to make the interlocutor feel comfortable prior to making a request. From an intercultural perspective, learners showed some awareness of the fact that the role of greetings in establishing a context in which a request can be made is variable across languages, pointing, for example, to the relative importance given to greeting strangers in English compared to Norwegian. Data from each age group revealed that learners' sense of what is important when making a request is closely related to their intergroup perceptions; namely, their perspective that people in England are more polite. These perceptions were partly justified with reference to linguistic elements such as the verbosity of English language discourse (e.g. the perceived need to say "please" a lot), as well as nonlinguistic elements such as tea-drinking culture. Overall, the study effectively shows that even for young learners, the process of deciding how to communicate appropriately in English engages a broad range of linguistic and cultural knowledge, as well as stereotypical perceptions of cultural groups. In this sense, it helps elaborate the notion of metapragmatic awareness from an intercultural perspective and points to the potential for mobilizing learners' taken-for-granted assumptions and feeding them back to them for further reflection within pedagogy for young learners.

## 29.4 Current Issues

One current issue in the field is the need to further develop theoretical and empirical links between the field of intercultural language learning and the field of intercultural pragmatics, which is itself coming to incorporate insights from social psychology and moral psychology (e.g. Spencer-Oatey and Kadár 2021).

As discussed in [Section 29.1.2](#), theoretical insights from intercultural pragmatics around the moral order and the socio-cognitive nature of pragmatic interpretation have helped elaborate the ontology of language and the epistemology of learning within an intercultural and multilingual perspective. Research on (meta)pragmatic awareness within intercultural language learning has clear synergies with the field of intercultural pragmatics and, in fact, it may be argued that L2 pragmatics learning viewed through an intercultural lens is one form of “intercultural pragmatics” (McConachy 2019). Although it is true that intercultural pragmatics is traditionally understood as an area of research focusing on real-world intercultural interactions (Kecskes 2014), there is a shared concern with understanding how individuals draw on their cognitive resources to make sense of messages produced by another individual from a different cultural background, especially through a process of interactive negotiation. Language learning does not always involve direct intercultural interaction, but it does involve learners in interpretation of meanings located in a different cultural context and an analytical and reflective engagement whereby cultural frames of reference are given conscious consideration (see also, Liddicoat, this volume).

As the empirical research covered in this chapter reveals, language learners make sense of L2 pragmatic forms and meanings in a way that is informed by their existing assumptions about social relationships and their sense for what is “normal” in

interaction, which is largely shaped by interactional experiences in their native language. Similarly, learners also adopt L2/L3/L4 pragmatics and linked interactional experiences as a point of reference for looking back on the L1 and other languages (Cenoz 2008; Kecskes 2014; Hopkinson 2021). The nature of this synergistic relationship between cultural frames of reference within the mind is an important area of focus, both for intercultural language learning and for the field of intercultural pragmatics. One area of difference is that intercultural pragmatics often deals with real-time intercultural interactions which necessitate swift interpretation and communicative action. This means that it can be difficult to capture interpretive processes at work. On the other hand, research on (meta)pragmatic awareness within intercultural language learning often takes place in a space where learners can carefully reflect on language use from multiple perspectives, and it therefore provides a picture of the specific ways that learners mobilize cultural concepts, assumptions, normative knowledge, and perceptions of self and other in processes of meaning-making. Thus, empirical research on (meta)pragmatic awareness in intercultural language learning can contribute to the field of intercultural pragmatics, and there is a need for more cross-fertilization in these areas.

Within intercultural language learning, there is still room for more theoretical development concerning the relationship between pragmatics and culture. As discussed earlier, the conceptualization of the relationship between language and culture within intercultural language learning has largely been centered on a semiotic view of culture and the idea that culture is located “within” language. One current limitation of this theoretical stance is that although language structure and use is often discussed in connection to cultural elements such as norms and values, these individual elements are

seldom theorized in connection to the substantial research on these topics within cross-cultural psychology and, increasingly, intercultural pragmatics (e.g., Spencer-Oatey and Xing 2019; Spencer-Oatey and Kadár 2021). This need to more clearly elaborate these individual notions and thus more specifically unpack the relationship between pragmatics and culture is of course not unique to language education. Rather, it is an issue more fundamentally for the field of pragmatics itself, as work which makes connections between pragmatic patterns and underlying patterns of cultural organization is still relatively limited. In elaborating the relationship between pragmatics and culture in theoretical terms, it will be important to move beyond national-level conceptions of culture (which are also dominant in cross-cultural and intercultural pragmatics) in order to clarify how elements such as norms, values, and assumptions operate at different cultural scales (e.g. national, regional, institutional), how they interface with linguistic practices, and the implications that this might have for how (meta)pragmatic awareness is conceptualized within intercultural language learning and also more broadly within intercultural pragmatics.

## **29.5 Conclusions and Future Directions for Research**

As the investigation of (meta)pragmatic awareness within intercultural language learning is an emerging area of inquiry, no studies have yet addressed the question of how (meta)pragmatic awareness develops from a more long-term perspective. Existing studies clearly orient toward awareness as a situated phenomenon that is shaped by learners' analytical and reflective engagement. This may be considered particularly valuable from a teaching perspective, as it reveals that even relatively short reflective

discussions can be productive in terms of helping learners consider pragmatic meanings from diverse perspectives and bring into awareness various assumptions that underpin pragmatic interpretation, particularly when scaffolded by the teacher. It would be valuable for future studies to look at the development of (meta)pragmatic awareness over a longer span, with a particular focus on how sustained analytical and reflective engagement with language use helps the learner develop sensitivity to the impact of cultural differences on meaning-making processes and how learners come to incorporate this sensitivity into their own interactions.

This relationship between (meta)pragmatic awareness and the learners' own language use is currently under-researched within intercultural language learning, as studies thus far have focused primarily on how awareness relates to learners' interpretive capacities. [McConachy's \(2018\)](#) study does include a focus on how learners reflect on aspects of their own classroom-based language production and suggest how metapragmatic awareness informed by such reflection might impact on learners' future interactions. However, more research is needed to understand how the development of (meta)pragmatic awareness, as conceptualized within intercultural language learning, functions as a resource for individuals in their own interactions outside the classroom.

There are two interrelated elements which could be given consideration here. One is how (meta)pragmatic awareness helps learners reflect on the context and more mindfully consider the options for interaction. In essence, the issue here is how awareness contributes to the learner's own agency and sense of identity when creating and maintaining interpersonal connections through the medium of an L2 (cf. [van Compernelle 2014](#); [Taguchi and Ishihara 2018](#)). The second is how awareness allows learners to be more attuned to an interlocutor's pragmatic choices and to withhold

judgment when conversational strategies or speech act realization patterns diverge from expectations. In other words, research is needed to confirm the extent to which awareness of the potential impact of cultural differences on interaction leads individuals to be more tolerant and reflective in actual interactions. Again, this is an area in which synergies between intercultural language learning and intercultural pragmatics are likely to become apparent.

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