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In Their Own Voices: Reflections of Native and Nonnative English Speaking TESOL Graduate Students on On-Line Pragmatic Instruction to EFL Learners

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Abstract

In this paper I discuss a study that involved incorporating instructional pragmatics into an ESL Methodology course. Graduate students who were taking an ESL Methodology course were required to read the literature on interlanguage and instructional pragmatics and teach requestive speech act strategies to Taiwanese EFL students through computer-mediated communication (CMC). Students' reflective journals, online discussions, and instructor's field notes were analyzed qualitatively for emergent themes. The findings reveal how the incorporation of instructional pragmatics in an ESL Methodology course impacted the content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge of the graduate students who were involved in this project and what challenges they faced as they taught pragmatics to EFL learners through the use of CMC. Suggestions for ESL teacher education programs are provided and ideas for further research are provided at the end.

Introduction

Pragmatic competence requires being able to speak and behave appropriately, and being able to understand what others say and do. Pragmatic competence is a central component in both Canale and Swain (1980) model of communicative competence and Bachman's (1990) model of language competence. It incorporates the ability to use the language to express a wide range of functions as well as interpret the illocutionary force of utterances in discourse according to the sociocultural context in which they are used. In Bachman's model, pragmatic competence is not subordinated to knowledge of grammar and text organization but coordinated with formal linguistic and textual

knowledge and interacts with 'organizational competence' in complex ways. In order to communicate appropriately in a target language, pragmatic competence in second language (L2) must be reasonably well developed.

Despite the growing body of evidence that supports the role of raising pragmatic awareness for language learners, L2 instruction mainly focuses on grammar and ignores the pragmatic development of language learners. Studies addressing the realization of speech acts by second- or foreign-language learners (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001; Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1996; Olshtain & Blum-Kulka, 1985) have found that even advanced language learners who know grammar and word meanings still often face difficulties in comprehending a speaker's intention or conveying appropriate politeness in communicative contexts. Studies have found that when pragmatics is not offered, opportunities for developing pragmatic competence are quite limited (Kasper, 2000). According to the research, without explicit attention to pragmatics, its development by learners can take a considerable amount of time (Cohen, 2008; Rose, 2005).

Many studies have examined the effect of instructional intervention in the development of pragmatic knowledge (e.g., Eslami-Rasekh, 2005; Cohen, 2005; Schauer, 2006). Most of these studies found a positive impact on language learners' pragmatic knowledge, which supports the hypothesis that pragmatic ability can be enhanced or developed through systematic planned classroom activities.

Although the importance of raising pragmatic competence of learners has increasingly been recognized in the literature, it is still underrepresented in EFL/ESL teacher education programs (Bardovi-Harlig, 1992; Biesenback-Lucas, 2003; Eslami-Rasekh, 2005; Karatepe, 2001; Vasquez & Sharpless, 2009). As stated by Kasper (2001), pragmatic dimension is one of the vital components of language proficiency to be considered in ESL teacher education programs. Vasquez and Sharpless (2009) findings of a nationwide survey of U.S.TESOL education programs revealed that only 20% of MA TESOL programs in the U.S. had a course dedicated to pragmatics. More than half of these courses reported having a theoretical rather than practical focus. The situation in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) contexts could be more limited (Ishihara, 2010). According to Karatepe (2001) in two Turkish EFL teacher-training institutions, pragmalinguistic issues have been outwardly underrepresented. Her findings suggest that there is no systematic and planned teaching of this aspect of language in their syllabuses. As the interviewed lecturers confirmed, these issues are only touched upon when the teacher thought it was necessary in the process of teaching other issues, such as analyzing literary texts. These teacher trainees are assumed to pick up pragmalinguistic features along the process of training (Karatepe, 2001, p. 179).

The literature supports that pragmatically related instructional material and activities are seriously underrepresented in instructional resources used in ESL and EFL settings (Ishihara, 2010). Only recently there has been an increase in the number of publications on pragmatic instruction aimed to prospective and practicing teachers (e.g., Ishihara &

Cohen 2010, Tatsuki & Houck 2010, O-Keeffe, Adolphs & Clancy, 2011). Additionally, teaching resources have traditionally done a poor job of raising understanding of the cultural variances that dramatically affect pragmatic awareness. As Crandall and Basturkmen (2004) argue, many of the textbooks used to instruct EFL learners neglect the appropriateness of speech acts in various situations.

For pragmatic instruction to become a reality in L2 classrooms, pragmatics should become an important part of the TESOL teacher education programs. An effective teacher of L2 pragmatics needs to have knowledge about different pragmatic issues such as speech acts, politeness, appropriate pragmatic norms, and variational pragmatics (content knowledge). Additionally, teachers should be able to transform the content knowledge (pragmatic knowledge) into pedagogical strategies (pedagogical pragmatics) and be able to teach and assess pragmatic competence of the learners in locally appropriate ways (Eslami-Rasekh, 2005; Ishihara, 2007; Shulman, 1986; Yates & Wigglesworth, 2005). Researchers need to investigate how pre-service and in-service teachers can develop the pragmatically related content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge to be able to teach L2 pragmatics effectively. In response to this need, the present research is an attempt to bring into the forefront the voices of the graduate students who participated in a semester-long ESL methods course which included pragmatics as content knowledge and pedagogical pragmatics as one of its main focus areas.

In response to scarcity of research in this area, the present study describes an effort in incorporating instructional pragmatics into a teacher development course (Methods of Teaching ESL) in the U.S., and its students' reactions to such endeavor. In the following, I discuss the context of the study, the curriculum and materials used for teacher development, the data collection procedure, and the analysis. This will be followed by our findings which demonstrate both the successes of the program and the challenges these graduate students (teacher learners) faced in teaching pragmatics to EFL learners through CMC as revealed in their own voices.

Methodology

Context

The graduate ESL education program at Texas A&M University includes both native and nonnative English speaking Master and PhD students. There is no stand-alone pragmatics course in the program. Due to my own interest, background, and the belief that pragmatics is an important component of language ability to develop, I have incorporated pragmatics into the graduate ESL Methodology course I teach once a year. About 1/3 of the course is allocated to pragmatics and pragmatic instruction. During the semester of the study, the students were given mainly explicit instruction on pedagogical and interlanguage pragmatics in each 3 hour class session (13 sessions) at the beginning of each class for about 50 minutes. The pragmatics instruction focused on "request" speech act and its mitigating devices. Graduate students were provided with lesson plans and given the option to modify the plan depending on the interest, needs,

and language proficiency of the learners they were assigned to teach. Graduate students (teacher learners) were assigned readings related to different speech acts, research in interlanguage pragmatics, methods of data collection in interlanguage pragmatics, and instructional pragmatics which included awareness –raising activities, methods of teaching pragmatics (implicit, explicit, mixed), and pragmatic assessment (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig, & Mahan-Taylor, 2003). The complete course reading list is included in the appendix. Students were involved not only in reading the pragmatically related research but also in applying it in real world context and incorporating the research findings into their practice. Thus both conceptual and procedural knowledge of the teacher learners were addressed in this project (Pasternak & Bailey, 2004). Students were also required to use what they learned in the course and in their EFL teaching experiences teaching requestive speech act and its mitigating devices (internal and external modifiers) to write a research paper.

Participants

The participants included 22 graduate students in the field of Teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) at Texas A&M University (14 Masters and 8 PhD, 15 native (N)and 7 non-native (NN), 2 males and 20 females). The EFL learners who participated in this study included 42 undergraduate students majoring in English as a foreign language (EFL) from a University in Taiwan. Their first language was Mandarin. The graduate students at Texas A&M University were each assigned to one or two Taiwanese partners. IRB approval was granted by the university and the participants granted consent to the researcher to use the course materials, their reflections, and other information in the course for research purposes.

The graduate students delivered ten weeks of lesson plans to their partners in Taiwan through e-mail correspondence and WebCT discussions. The participants were required to submit at least two e-mails to their partners per week and to participate in the WebCT discussions focused on pragmatics related issues and their teaching experience during the semester.

Procedure

The professional development model used in this study addressed both content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge of the teachers. It involved teachers in empirical research about pragmatics, and reflective engagement with pedagogical and curricular knowledge through the development and application of lessons in actual teaching situation. The aim was to provide teacher learners with pragmatic and metapragmatic knowledge, engage them in teaching pragmatics to EFL learners, facilitate their ability to incorporate L2 pragmatics into the teaching of the L2, and be able to assess learners' pragmatic competence. The learner as researcher approach (Eslami-Rasekh, 2005) was used and graduate ESL students (teacher learners) became researchers, read the relevant literature on a particular speech act (request), collected authentic samples of speech acts and examples of miscommunications, and analyzed the data based on the

proposed frameworks of requestive speech acts in the literature (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989).

In order to develop the ability of the students to transfer theoretical knowledge into practice, they were asked to develop lesson plans for teaching a speech act, modify the lesson plans on requestive speech act provided to them by the researcher if needed, and apply it during online teaching of the speech act to EFL learners. In order to capture their voices and to examine the effectiveness of the professional development, graduate students were required to reflect on their readings and teaching through reflection journals (3 times during the semester) and participate in online discussions on WebCT Vista (5 times during the semester). Finally, they were required to write a research paper on instructional pragmatics. Some students also presented their research at conferences (ERE at Texas A&M University, and TESOL Convention) and one of the students co-authored a paper with the faculty.

Curriculum

As shown in table 1, the pragmatic teaching model used by the graduate students to teach pragmatics to EFL learners included five components : a) motivation, b) form search, c) form comparison, d) form analysis, and 3) speech act production and assessment (Eslami-Rasekh, 2005; Rose, 2005).

Formative pragmatic assessment was used by the teacher learners in each stage of the instruction as they provided feedback to the learners. Issues related to informed pragmatic choice and identity were included in class discussions and teachers were encouraged to respect learner's choices if they were informed choices (Ishihara & Tarone, 2009).

Table 1. Instructional pragmatic activities

Week	Activity Topics
1	Motivation
2	Form Search
3	Form Comparison
4	Form Analysis
5	Use of Speech Act
6	Form Search/Form Analysis (Directness level and mitigation)
7	Form Comparison
8	Form Search/Use of Speech Acts
9	Form Analysis
10	Form Comparison/Use of Speech Acts

Data

Students' reflection journals and online discussions were used to examine their views on the course assignments and their teaching experience. Students were asked to reflect on their teaching and course assignments and to share their success stories and the challenges they faced in teaching pragmatics to EFL learners through CMC. Data included students' reflections throughout the semester (3 times) and online discussions (5 times). Instructor field notes were also used for triangulation purposes and data was triangulated through deductive analysis.

Data Analysis

Constant comparative analysis was used to code the data for emergent themes. Another researcher (a PhD student) coded 20% of the data and inter-rater reliability was shown to be acceptable (80% agreement). The findings were triangulated with the researcher field notes and reflections.

Findings

The analysis of our data revealed that pragmatic content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge of the teachers improved. The findings also indicate that the participants developed intercultural awareness and long term, lasting relations as a result of this telecommunication project. The findings also highlighted the challenges that teacher learners faced in order to teach pragmatics through CMC. In the following section, I will discuss each one of these themes by sharing typical examples from teachers' reflection journals to illustrate the points.

Content Knowledge

The process of identifying and coding features in data revealed that teachers developed their pragmatic and metapragmatic knowledge as the result of being involved in the pragmatically focused professional development activities integrated into their one semester long class. As mentioned by one of our participants:

> Before this semester I had never been introduced to the concept of pragmatics. Pragmatics was just a big word that I saw on my syllabus and I had no idea how it would apply to language learning. However, through my readings and through my telecommunication project, I have found that pragmatics is an important part of language learning and that it is imperative that it be included in language teacher education (AL).

Reflections of almost all the students revealed the lack of pragmatic knowledge and pedagogy among the students at the beginning of the course which corroborates other researchers' findings that pragmatics is not addressed in master and teacher education programs (Bardovi-Harlig, 1992; Biesenback-Lucas, 2003; Eslami-Rasekh, 2005; Karatepe, 2001; Vasquez & Sharpless, 2009). As one of the NN graduate students reflected:

> Before enrolling in this course the extent of my pragmatic awareness was quite limited. I knew there was a "hidden" almost "unspoken language" that all native speakers seemed to understand, but where was the rule book? On what day did they teach these rules in school? I guess I must have been absent on those days because I am an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learner and I have never received a day of pragmatic instruction in my life. Sadly enough, my story is that of thousands of EFL learners who after many years of learning, living, and communicating in English still cannot effectively perform linguistic acts within context (DC).

Similarly, several other teacher learners' reflections discussed examples of how the issue of pragmatics was not considered either when they learned English or in their undergraduate programs. The reflections show strong evidence that the teacher learners' knowledge of pragmatics and pragmatic instruction was enhanced.

Pedagogical Content Knowledge

Our participants were all very clear that not only did their content knowledge of pragmatics considerably improve, but also their pedagogical knowledge and ability to incorporate what they learned into their teaching in various ways. As indicated by one of the participants:

> Based on the parameters set forth in each week's lesson plan as well as in the online discussion, the learners' requests were analyzed according to the recognition of the situation, interlocutors, and imposition involved in the speech act. The appropriateness of the responses was compared and contrasted both over time and with the other learners to form a clearer conception of the development of and approximation to the target language norms for the speech act of requesting (KC).

The teacher learners articulated the ways in which their experiences during the project enabled them to connect their theoretical knowledge to practice. For example, one of the students (DC) reflected on different instructional methods and assessment of students' pragmatic development:

> This course has afforded me the opportunity to gain a broader perspective and firsthand knowledge of explicit and implicit pragmatic instruction and its effects on learner's language learning outcome. I have tried to provide EFL learners in Taiwan authentic input opportunities which they would otherwise not encounter in an environment where English is not the primary means of communication (DC).

As the quote above shows, the teachers realized the importance of 'authentic' input opportunities for pragmatic development of their students and the impoverished nature of natural input in EFL contexts (Eslami-Rasekh, 2005; Rose, 1997).

The graduate students' awareness also included their gained pragmatic knowledge on the appropriate use of requests and its connection to contextual factors. As indicated

below, their research skills were also being developed as students were reading related research in the field and discussing them in class.

> Through readings and classroom discussions, I was able to assess the overall appropriateness or inappropriateness of the requests, given the contextual factors. I also asked learners themselves to assess themselves based on the criteria I molded for them. However, the limited number of subjects makes it very difficult to generalize the results of this project to all Taiwanese NNSs. As such, a larger sample size would go a long way towards resolving this deficiency (KM).

Students became aware that a number of different aspects of language use were involved in making requests and thus in its assessment. As the above quote shows, students developed the competence to assess the appropriateness of learners' requests over time (longitudinally) and compare it with other learners' pragmatic performance at similar level of language proficiency to gauge their pragmatic development. The data show that involvement in the course activities which involved data collection and analysis of speech acts and developing instructional materials, not only enhanced the graduate students' knowledge and understanding of pragmatics, but also directly impacted their pedagogical understandings. However, it should be noted that the two types of knowledge were not clearly delineated in teacher learners' reflections. Thus, a clear-cut distinction between content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge is not always possible (McEwan & Ball, 1991).

Additionally, several students also pointed out that materials and resources provided to them throughout the course were highly useful. For example, GC stated that "supplemental materials, references given to us, and example lesson plans were really helpful." Another participant, KC, made a similar point:

> [T]he lesson plans were very helpful. They were well thought-out and organized because they progressed from general examples and instructions to more specific examples and instructions. These lessons gave us guidelines to find an effective way to go about teaching the ELLs about making requests in English (KC).

Even though our participants included both native and nonnative English speaking graduate students, the issues raised and the benefits gained did not reflect any marked differences. Both groups discussed lack of knowledge and preparation to teach pragmatics similarly. As one of the NES students, DC, mentioned:

> I realized that I had to adjust my pace, and my vocabulary, in order to help them understand what I was saying, as well as encourage them to write back. In a sense, my Taiwanese partners were not the only ones being challenged by the English language; I, too, had to critically consider the words I used, the meanings that I intended to convey, and the possible misunderstandings in my e-mails. Despite English being my native

> language, I did not know about its hidden rules, how complicated it is to convey them to learners at times and it too posed challenges for me. (DC)

The teacher learners articulated the ways in which their own pragmatic knowledge and metapragamtic knowledge was also improved. These reflections show that NS teacher learners are likely equally unprepared to teach pragmatics as their own metapragmatic awareness may even be less developed than that of NNSTs (Meier, 2003, p. 201). Thus, neither the NS nor NNS teacher has an a priori advantage in dealing with pragmatic aspects of language use, but rather the teacher who is well-educated in pragmatics and instructional pragmatics and has the corresponding personal experience. As submitted by Yates and Wigglesworth (2003, p. 262), the ESL profession has continually struggled against simplistic notions that native speakers of English already know the language and are, therefore, in a position to easily transform this substantive knowledge into pedagogical strategies. While such arguments are highly debatable in most areas of language and language use, they are manifestly false in relation to areas of pragmatic and sociocultural competence where native speaker intuitions are notoriously unreliable.

Intercultural Communication Experiences

Additionally, e-mail exchange provided students with new opportunities for establishing long-term relations with their partners. Participants mentioned that as a result of this telecommunications project, they developed relationships, learned from other cultures, learned about the conventions of language use, and how to teach it. Several of the students commented that the project had enabled them to pay more attention to cross-cultural differences and to open doors for intercultural communication and mutual understanding. For example, AL commented:

> One of my partners informed me that, in Taiwan, it is polite for someone to tell you to come to their house for dinner and not really expect that you will come. This revelation brought about a good discussion of pragmatic differences and it helped to set a foundation for the information that we covered for the telecommunication project. It was a mutual learning experience (AL).

Resonating with AL's comments above, another participant (CJ) mentioned:

> In addition, it was interesting to develop a relationship with these students. It is always humbling to realize that there are real lives out there that go beyond the life that you know; that there are people out there experiencing similar (or even more intense) pressures to your own. To receive e-mails describing their reflections on their own experiences or even some details about themselves (likes and dislikes, personalities, etc.) was exciting and rewarding. Although these are small celebrations, they are important because they reflected our developing relationship (CJ).

Another participant, KC, noted: "I noticed that Wei Pan was very apologetic when she took awhile to respond. It seems like in Taiwan they not only apologize more but also do it more intensely." As indicated by these participants, intercultural communications via the computer or any other communicative technology can enhance the connectivity between cultures through highlighting the inherent similarities between language learners and people while allowing students to learn about and appreciate the differences between various cultures. This understanding, when guided by an informed teacher, will allow students to become better equipped to live and communicate in a diverse, global society. These examples indicate that an unpredicted outcome of the professional development was the development of long-lasting relationships among participants and the enhancement of intercultural awareness and communication. The ability to successfully communicate with those from other cultures and backgrounds is an essential skill to develop as opportunities to communicate cross-culturally increase in the world. The world will continue to develop in the twenty-first century into a global marketplace, with intelligible, accurate, and meaningful communications acting as the key to successful interactions and transactions among people. Using the very technology that has allowed for the development of this global society to help enhance communication skills is an obvious and necessary, component of language education for present and future generations.

Affordables Provided by Technology

Because this telecommunication project and the lesson delivery was conducted through email communication and online discussion, students reflected on what technology can offer as well as challenges associated with the use of technology. Several participants discussed ways in which their instruction was individualized through the use of technology and how they could better respond to individual learners' needs. A similar benefit brought up by the teacher learners was the possibility of low student –teacher ratio which helped them to "individually customize the lessons" (GC). As stated by KC:

> Another strength provided by the use of technology was that the ELLs had the opportunity to be taught by a native English speaker. Also, the teacher to student ratio was very small, and this allowed me to give my students individual attention and respond to each of their e-mails. If the groups had been too large it would have been difficult to make contact with each student about each lesson. (KC)

Another benefit provided by the use of technology is that students and tutors can communicate at times and places that is convenient for both and learners can become more involved in their own learning process and develop their learning-to-learn skills. As KC submitted, "I would start out more specific in my instructions, and then once I know the students have a basic understanding of requests I would allow them to create their own situations and examples of requests." The role of learner's agency and autonomy is more prominent when pragmatic issues of language use and language

learning are involved (Ishihara & Tarone, 2009). An acknowledgement of this benefit is clearly provided by one of the participants:

> One of the effective activities I used was to do role reversal. I asked my Taiwanese students to provide the situations and I as a native speaker responded- they became more interested in the project. After all, the goal for the Taiwanese students was to practice their English skills. At first, I kept asking my students questions and analyzing their responses, which probably felt more like I was constantly testing them than anything else. [W]hen they were given the agency and power to ask me how I would respond to certain situations, they were able to evaluate my pragmatic norms and compare them to their own. So they made comments about my responses such as: Wow, I wouldn't have thought to have responded like that. I would have said _____ instead. Is there any reason that you chose to say _____ instead of _____? If I had said _____ instead, would that have been appropriate as well? Why or why not? (MI).

As mentioned before, the availability of authentic language input is highly limited in EFL contexts (Eslami-Rasekh, 2005, Rose, 2005). Technology can break the time and space boundaries and provide NN speakers with the opportunity to interact with native speakers of the language. As one of the students commented, "It has been a wonderful experience. Sharing and helping students learn English is a lot of fun. Probably the most interesting thing is that NNES students get the chance to converse with NES. That's real progress for technology." Similarly, another participant (CJ) commented, "Ability to communicate with people thousands of miles away without any travel expenses and technological gifts (spell check, email, discussion board, Internet) provided unique opportunities to us."

Presumably, the project enhanced not only the teacher learners ability to teach pragmatics, but it also fostered EFL students' pragmatic competence as captured by GC's reflections below:

> An added success that I have encountered through this study has been the incredible growth that my student Vivian has experienced. From the inception of the study, Vivian's discussions were rather short, undetailed, and at times lacked a true understanding of speech acts. However, as the project progressed and our discussions grew deeper, it was evident that Vivian was beginning to develop a broader pragmatic schema. This telecommunication project has made me hopeful about the new age of technology and the vast hurdles that we have surpassed and will overtake for many years to come.

Apparently, as revealed in the participants' reflection journals, the use of technology has had its inherent challenges when instruction is conducted only through an online

modality. In the next section, the challenges brought up and discussed by the students are presented.

Challenges

Although technology offers exciting new experiences for language teaching, it also presents significant challenges (Salasberry, 2001). Participants mentioned some challenges they faced when teaching pragmatics through the use of technology. These included physical, cultural, and linguistic barriers as discussed below.

Lack of adequate involvement by the students was stated as "Students seemed to feel they had the option of not responding to some requests" (GC). Another participant mentioned that 'delay in some of the students' responses, broke the momentum of our discourse and caused some participants, including myself, to become sidetracked" (MI).

While lack of adequate involvement and delayed responses was brought up by some participants, some other participants commented on the Taiwanese EFL learners' lack of sufficient linguistic confidence or lack of needed language proficiency and fear of making grammatical mistakes. As one participant submitted:

> I think that they were almost intimidated to say something wrong on the discussion board because it could be viewed by the whole class. I think that, if I were to do this project over again, I would try to involve my partners in discussion by using a live chat forum. Perhaps they would feel more comfortable with that format because they are used to chatting online and their responses wouldn't be viewed by the whole class. I guess that sometimes it is hard to predict how students will respond to a certain assignment (AL).

Lack of face-to-face interaction and nonverbal cues in online communication was another impediment raised by several participants. As KM mentioned, "[W]ithout face-to-face, intonation, facial expressions, and body language, there is still a hindrance among us to communicate. When one takes into consideration that body language, tone and other factors all play an important role in the act of requesting, a huge component of instruction is lost." Similarly, MI submitted that "I was challenged because I was unsure of how to approach someone I had not met in person. I could not use any physical gestures to give me a clue as to what they were thinking or how they were feeling. It is hard to teach through writing alone, no face-to-face interaction." To compensate for lack of non-verbal features of language and paralinguistic cues, some participants used audiovisual materials and video to enable the learners to better understand the interactions. As Rose (1997) suggested, "[A]udiovisual material may be useful to expose learners to the pragmatic aspects of the target language" (p. 419). KC, for example stated, "To compensate for lack of face to face interaction in our telecommunication project, I used video recordings and movie scripts to enhance the written scripts used in the emails."

Time difference between the USA and Taiwan was another impediment for online communication. As indicated by GC for example, "[A]nother challenge was also the major time difference between the US and Taiwan, which hindered us from ever communicating simultaneously." Research exposes how participants of synchronous communication produce a greater amount of language compared to asynchronous communication, so it would have been more beneficial for the students if they were able to communicate simultaneously (Kol & Schcolnik, 2008).

Another point mentioned by some of the teacher learners was the perception of their role as peer or teacher by their EFL partners. As GC mentioned, "Were we considered as their peer or as their teacher? What the students were expecting and what I was expecting going into the project, may have been different." This issue was raised more frequently by NN graduate students than native English speaking students. As GC mentioned, "Sharing the same mother tongue and being a NN speaker of English, confused the learners as what our role was and it, at times diminished our authority. I am still not completely sure if they see me as a peer or a teacher and was therefore uncertain of how to approach them."

Concluding Remarks

Based on the data gathered and analyzed in this study, it is believed that the activities used in this graduate ESL methodology course not only enhanced these students' pragmatic ability, but also it enhanced the pedagogical content knowledge of the participants. Kasper (1997) emphasizes the necessity of inclusion of pragmatics in teacher education programs by asserting, " Raising teachers' awareness of cross-culturally diverse patterns of linguistic action, including those performed under the institutional constraints of language classroom, must play an essential role in the education and development of language teaching professionals" (p. 113). The findings clearly reveal that the pragmatically-oriented classroom activities and the readings in developmental and instructional pragmatics provided in this teacher education program have promoted the teachers' awareness of the importance of teaching pragmatics in their ESL/EFL classroom and enhanced their ability to incorporate pragmatics in their L2 teaching.

This project provided practice using the research based pragmatic instruction activities through CMC. As submitted by the participants, the online discussions provided an excellent forum for exchange of ideas, issues, challenges, and experiences. They not only discussed the readings on pragmatics, speech acts, requests, and how to teach pragmatics, but also they discussed the critical issues related to identity, pragmatic instruction and pragmatic assessment. The native and nonnative English speaking graduate students shared their unique experiences in intercultural communication and provided examples of pragmatic failures.

Participants' reflections indicate that the teaching materials and the lesson plans that were provided offered the scaffolding that these participants needed to implement pragmatic instruction through technology. The teacher learners realized that they had

to modify the lesson plans to meet the needs of their students and differentiation was a necessity in their instruction since the learners had different levels of language proficiency.

The challenges stated by the students signify that Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) calls for appropriate explanation and extensive training if the students are to be successful (DiGiovanni & Nagaswami, 2001). In a study by DiGiovanni and Nagaswami (2001), students participating in an online peer review process found pleasure with both online and face-to-face aspects of the class. The mix of both seemed to appeal to many students. Even though the online teaching was used for teaching pragmatics in this project, the challenges students mentioned with the use of technology reinforces the idea that adding a face-to-face component will enhance the learning outcome. To promote telecommunication projects as a component of foreign language programs, educators must endeavor to overcome limitations associated with the use of technology for teaching. Teacher educators should increase expertise in telecommunication areas and explore theories relevant to online instruction. They also should provide preservice teachers in universities with substantial opportunities and guidance for teaching and learning online and teach them instructional strategies, which are effective in online environments.

Given the advances made in technology and the increase of communication via email and the Internet, it is important that scholars and researchers examine different methods of teaching pragmatics that are being employed all over the world. With the growth of English as a global language, it is quickly becoming the second language of many. There is a lot of information to be examined in the field of English as a Second Language education, particularly in the area of pragmatics. Researchers can continue to increase the awareness of the importance of pragmatics by continuing to examine current programs and offering solutions to increase effective instruction.

Students' reflections and discussions revealed that readings and lesson plans provided to scaffold their learning, and the actual practice of teaching pragmatics in the real world has been beneficial in their development as teacher learners. They have noted that the activities used to raise their pragmatic awareness and metapragmatic knowledge and applying their gained knowledge and skills in teaching EFL learners not only enhanced their pragmatic teaching skills and use of technology for teaching, but also enhanced their pragmatic knowledge and intercultural communication. As revealed in the findings, technology offers a lot of promises, but there are a number of challenges to overcome as well.

Even though our findings are promising and provide evidence that the incorporation of instructional pragmatics into an existing course enhanced teacher learners' content and pedagogical knowledge about pragmatics, there are some limitations that need to be discussed and suggestions for further research be provided. This study used mainly asynchronous modes of communication for delivering pragmatic instruction. Other forms of computer-mediated communication (e.g., synchronous online chat) need to be

examined to see if the learning outcomes and reactions of teachers/students would be different. Adding a video component and a face-to-face component and investigating its result would be beneficial as well.

Modeling of the behaviors is important for understanding pragmatics instruction and learning speech acts. In this telecommunication project, the teacher learners used mainly written dialogues of authentic conversations through CMC to teach pragmatics. Use of audiovisual materials and connection through video conferencing might lower some of the challenges the teachers faced while teaching pragmatics through technology. Students could also develop their pragmatic teaching ability in face-to-face interactions if they could be matched with international students on campus who are learning English.

In our teacher education program, pragmatics was incorporated into an existing graduate course. Other models that should be considered and examined include a standalone course as elective or required, elective workshops for in-service or prospective teachers (e.g., Ishihara, 2010) longer professional development models with teacher study groups (Yates & Wigglesworth, 2005).

It is not clear from our findings if the graduate students' increased pragmatic competence and teaching ability will influence their future instruction as they face the curricular and contextual limitations. Future studies should consider a longitudinal design and investigate how teachers' background education and knowledge of pragmatic instruction influence their future instructions. There needs to be follow up studies which involve observation of actual teaching practice of teachers if they choose to incorporate pragmatics in their L2 instruction. Vasquez's (2010) is an example of a follow up study suggested here.

In conclusion, it should be noted that pragmatics is part of all language areas and therefore it should penetrate the entire teacher education program. This does not mean that there is no need of a standalone pragmatics course in our teacher education programs. In addition to a course, we need to signify the importance of pragmatics as a vital component of learners' language ability in all our teacher education courses. Preservice teachers' and inservice teachers' own pragmatic sensitivity and knowledge needs to be addressed as well. They need to be exposed to a variety of teaching materials and activities that facilitate the metapragmatic awareness in both themselves and their students and apply it in developing pragmatic competence of their learners. As one of the participants (GC) put it, this is something that teachers are not likely to have experienced themselves as learners. Teachers, as the primary agents to deliver pragmatic instruction, need to be informed about pragmatics and educated to become reflective practitioners. They should also consider creative ways to teach pragmatics in different contexts and through different modalities. More studies similar to the ones published in this thematic issue will play a significant role to bring pragmatics into our L2 classrooms and our teacher education programs.

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Appendix

Course Reading List

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