TESL-EJ Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language
*The Electronic Journal for English as a Second Language*

**September 2011–Volume 15, Number 2**

# Do Bears Fly? Revisiting Conversational Implicature in Instructional Pragmatics

Jill C. Murray
Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia
<jill.murray@mq.edu.au>

## Abstract

Instructional pragmatics in teacher education is generally focused on ways that ESOL teachers can develop the pragmatic competence of L2 learners. However, as every interaction in an English medium classroom requires a high level of pragmatic competence on the part of teachers themselves, it can also be conceptualised more broadly to encompass the development of aspects of NNS teachers' own pragmatic competence which are important for teaching. This article reports on a case study involving a small group of NNS teachers who were taught about implicature with an explicit focus on concepts and metalanguage taken directly from Gricean pragmatics. Part of a published DCT which had been originally designed for research purposes was then adapted as a follow-up activity, assessing learning and providing students with opportunities to reflect on the linguistic and cultural factors underlying their initial responses. While raw test scores suggested that the explicit knowledge of theory was limited in its application to understanding implicature, the post-task reflections and discussion gave a very different picture. The research suggests firstly that despite the limitations of the Gricean model of implicature its intuitive nature makes it valuable for the education of teachers, and secondly that its application is most effective in a context of intercultural learning.

## Introduction

The teachability of pragmatics has been the subject of considerable recent interest (Kasper, 2007; Rose, 2005), and a number of studies have explored the value of the explicit teaching of pragmatic theory and metalanguage in classroom settings (Blight,

2002; Kubota, 1995; Lee, 2002). This paper reports on a study of explicit teaching of pragmatics to NNS teachers and explores some implications for theory and practice. Undertaken as part of a broader project to prepare overseas trained teachers for the workplace using an explicit focus on linguistic pragmatics, (Murray, J.C., 2009), the study focuses closely on one treatment and a follow-up activity which was implemented to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching. Learner responses and reflections provided a basis for consideration of the applicability of the written DCT in classroom teaching, and insights into the usefulness of the Gricean framework.

The students participating in the study were advanced learners who were planning to sit for an English entry test, the Professional English Assessment for Teachers (PEAT), success in which would allow them to apply for ongoing positions in primary and secondary public education in NSW, Australia. Some, but not all, were language teachers. The PEAT included an assessment of pragmatic aspects of communicative competence, and the course aimed to prepare them both for this and for the communication needs which they would face on entry to the workplace. One of the areas that had been identified by the focus group of school principals who had given input to the test design specifications was that overseas trained teachers in the workplace could usually understand the literal meaning of what was said but would sometimes misinterpret underlying meanings. This could lead to various forms of pragmatic failure (Leech, 1983; Thomas, 1983), such as taking offence where none was intended, taking understated criticism literally as praise, misunderstanding irony, and responding to implied meanings in inappropriate ways. It was felt that increasing the level of facility in recognising and interpreting different types of implicatures might be beneficial to this group of learners, and (although it was not an explicit focus of this study) it was also anticipated that this knowledge could inform and enhance their own classroom teaching.

## Can pragmatic competence be taught?

The complexity of defining pragmatic competence and the diversity of approaches to teaching and assessing it have provided the basis for a diverse range of studies on the teachability of pragmatics. Some of these address the central question of the extent to which teaching makes a difference (Alcón Soler, 2005; Bardovi-Harlig, 2001; Kasper, 2007; LoCastro, 1997), and others look at how teaching can be undertaken in differing pedagogical settings (Salazar, 2003;Yates, 2004), or critically evaluate teaching materials (Crandall and Basturkmen, 2004; Vellenga, 2004). Comparative studies have been undertaken on the effect of inductive and deductive approaches (Rose & Ng, 2001) and the effect of the use of metalanguage (Eslami-Rasekh, Eslami-Rasekh & Fatahi, 2004; Eslami-Rasekh 2005). Some empirical studies have focussed on the effects of teaching different specific aspects of pragmatics. Speech acts have been the most widely explored (Cohen, 2004; Cohen & Ishihara, 2005; Golato, 2003; Koike, 1989; Takahashi, 2001) but also pragmatic fluency (House, 1996), formulaic routines, (Liddicoat & Crozet, 2001; Tateyama, 2001), and discourse features (Yoshimi, 2001; Wishnoff, 2000). Results have been mixed, but comprehensive review articles by Bardovi Harlig (2001), Rose (2005)

and a meta-analysis on the effect of L2 instruction (Jeon & Kaya, 2006) broadly sum up the findings of research in favour of the teachability of many aspects of pragmatics.

Early work on implicature using written scenarios with multiple choice questions established, not surprisingly, that NS were more able to understand implicatures than learners, (Carrell, 1979). Between 1988 and 1999 Bouton undertook a series of cross sectional and longitudinal studies, identifying implicature types that accounted for most difficulties in understanding, and exploring which ones were amenable to teaching input. The latter are important to this study and will be explored in more detail below. However, while there has been some interest in testing the ability to infer implicatures (Roever, 2006), the teaching of Gricean pragmatics has received limited attention. (Bromberek-Dyzman, & Ewert, 2010; Blight, 2002; Murray, N. 2010).

**The co-operative principle and conversational implicature**

At present, Gricean theory, while rarely if ever absent from introductory pragmatics courses or textbooks, is no longer considered cutting edge as a theoretical underpinning for pragmatics research. Kasper (2007) places it in the first of the three phases of pragmatics research. English teaching textbooks rarely if ever mention it, and where the teaching of pragmatics is tackled at all, it is mostly in the areas of speech act theory, politeness and pragmatic routines (Vellenga, 2004; Crandall & Basturkmen, 2004). Nevertheless, the fact remains that there are otherwise advanced level learners who experience difficulty in inferring indirect or non-literal speaker meaning, and there is a need for an accessible framework for exploring and approaching this.

The co-operative principle was first defined by Grice as: "Make your conversational contribution such as is required at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" (1975, p. 45).

That is to say, it is expected by a hearer that a speaker is abiding by this principle and will fashion his/her contribution under the four guiding maxims: that of providing an appropriate amount of information (*quantity*); which he/she has adequate evidence to believe is true (*quality*); which is relevant to the topic at hand (*relation*); and in a way that does not set out deliberately to confuse (*manner*). The reasons why a speaker may not observe these maxims may be accidental (*infringement*) or deliberate (*opting out*, or *violating or flouting* one of the maxims). In the case of flouting, the intent is to create an implicature. The hearer is expected to notice that the maxim has been breached, consider why this is the case, and infer the intended meaning together with any additional information retrievable from the way in which it was conveyed.

Keenan (1976) questioned the cultural universality of the Gricean maxims, finding different patterns of implicature in Malagasy speech. For example, Malagasy speakers would regularly provide less information than was required, even if they did have access to it. The category of *suspension* of a maxim was added later to account for these cases, where features of a specific context may take precedence over those predicted by the Gricean model.

As Thomas (1995) points out—the usage of these terms in the literature is not always as consistent as it should be. Figure 1 clarifies how the non-observance of the Gricean maxims will be defined in this paper, including divergences from the original, unstandardised terminology of Grice (1975). Reflecting convention, the umbrella terms "breach" and "non-observance" are used interchangeably. This diagram, originally devised for a postgraduate linguistics course, was used in the teaching program implemented in this study.

## The intervention

The class consisted of 11 advanced learners: all migrant teachers from India, Bangladesh, China, Korea, Japan and Cuba. As well as language, their teaching subjects included maths, science and geography. The explicit teaching of pragmatics occurred in nine 3-hour session throughout an eighteen week full time test preparation program and covered a range of topics (Murray, J.C., 2009). The aim of the teaching unit discussed in this study was to create a level of awareness through which the teachers would be more cognisant of implicature and more able to notice the relationship between language choices and the effectiveness of communication in their lives outside the classroom, (Schmidt, 1993; Takahashi, 2005). The teaching activities used materials which had been written and implemented by the researcher as part of her regular university teaching.

The intervention consisted of a lecture/notetaking activity, a group activity in which the notes were used to complete a summary of the main concepts of Gricean implicature, interpretation in groups of a set of scenarios using the categories of non-observance shown in Figure 1, and an open class discussion of real-life communicative events in which an implicatures would be created and/or inferred. The metalinguistic input also provided the opportunity to make a link with work in an earlier unit on different cultures and their positions regarding directness and explicitness (Hall, 1990; Hofstede, 1980; Wierzbicka, 2003).

The teaching was conducted in two 3-hour sessions, separated by a week. Out of class reading material was provided in the form of a chapter from an introductory work on pragmatics (Thomas, 1995), and an optional writing activity was also included. Teaching materials used in the intervention are reproduced in Appendix 1, as well as representative student responses. The follow-up inferencing task was conducted one week later.

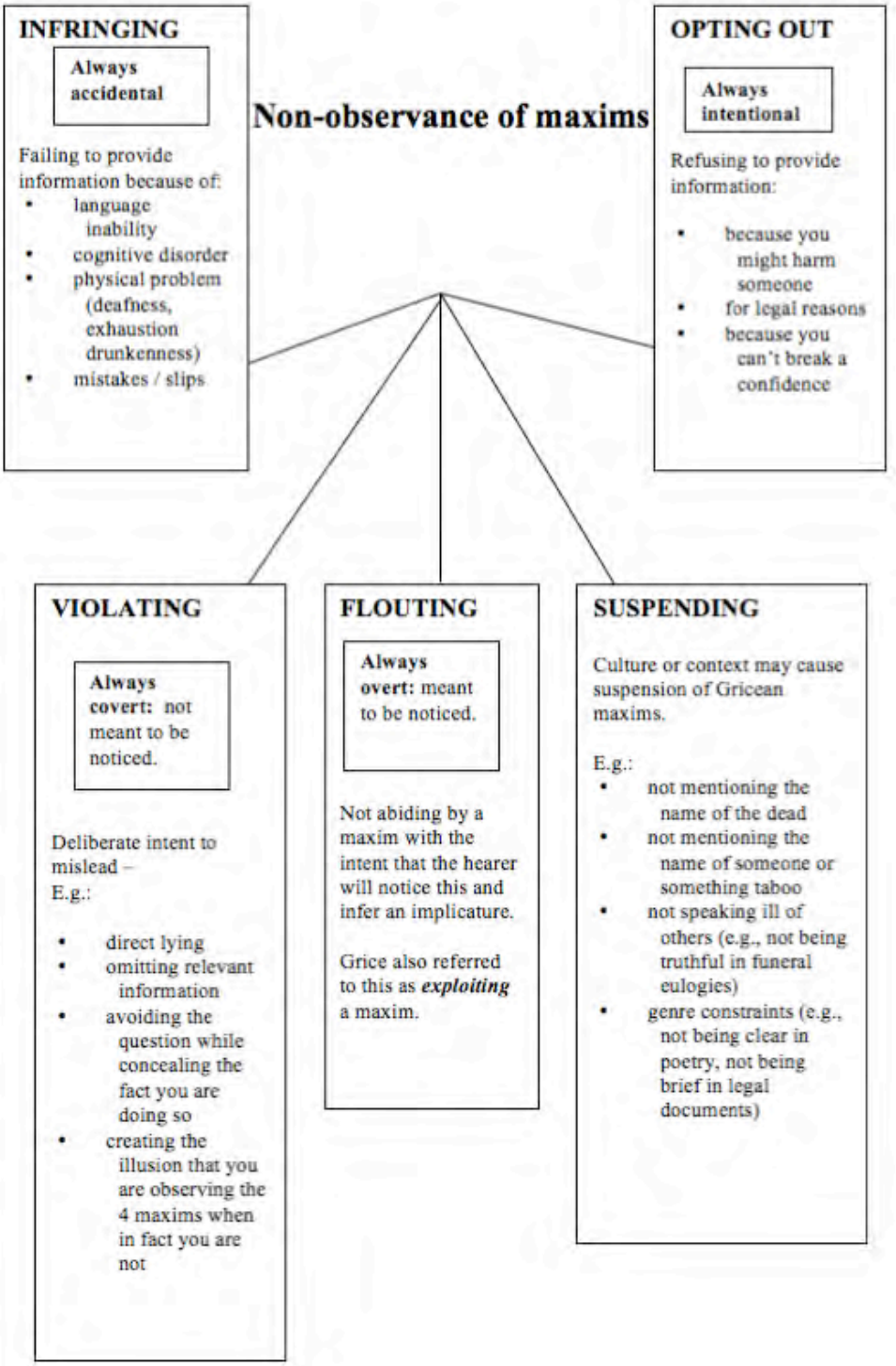


**Figure 1. Breaching Gricean maxims: Terminology and taxonomy**

## The inferencing task: Origins and research applications

In order to assess and extend learning, a multiple choice inferencing task was compiled by applying and/or adapting some of the items devised by Bouton (1988, 1994, 1999) and used, sometimes in adapted form, by Roever (2004, 2005, 2006). These examples were deliberately chosen because there already existed a literature on their use, and this had the potential to provide opportunities for comparison of the learners' responses and published ones from different contexts. They were also felt to have authenticity as a sample because the preferred multiple choice responses had originally been developed on the basis of actual NS interpretations of speakers' meaning in a set of scenarios, while the distractors were adapted from the most common NNS 'incorrect' answers. Examples for which NS did not select consistent responses had already been removed from the test battery.

In 1988, Bouton had used the first version of this test in a major cross sectional study, and established that cultural background was a strong predictor of NNS difficulties in interpreting implicatures. The set of open-ended questions developed in Bouton's study were administered to 60 American NS and 79 NNS, who were invited to provide one-line responses. Questions with insufficiently consistent NS responses were discarded or modified, and multiple choice questions were generated from the remainder, with the most common NS answer then identified as the "expected" response. It was acknowledged that different interpretations were possible and as such there was no "correct" response in the sense of a 100% consensus, even among native speakers. A control group of 20 Americans and a group of 436 learners from seven different cultural groups then completed the multiple choice test, and significant differences were found among the overall scores of three groups: the American native speakers, a group including the Germans, Spanish, Portuguese and Taiwan Chinese, and a third group comprised of Koreans, Japanese and PRC Chinese. This was independent of the group's average overall language proficiency scores as measured by a placement test. Implicatures related to the maxim of relation were found to be the easiest for both NS and NNS groups. Understated negative evaluation (flouting of the maxim of quantity) led to less consistent responses, with fewer than 80% of NS respondents giving the expected answer.

Subsequently Bouton (1994, 1999) posed the question of whether the ability to interpret implicature could develop by exposure and without explicit teaching. In a follow-up study after 4.5 years, 30 of the original 436 learners studying in the US were retested using the same multiple choice questions. They showed considerable improvement, but there remained a statistically significant difference between the NS and NNS responses. Not all types of implicature manifested the same degree of improvement. Specifically, there were 8 items in Bouton's post test in which the frequency of the NNS responses matching expected ones was unexpectedly low. In terms of Grice's implicature categories these did not belong to any specific type, but contained cultural references which may have been inaccessible to the learners: for example, recognising that an expression like "just like mama use to make" was a compliment in

American culture. In 1993, Bouton conducted a follow-up study of teaching, and found that some implicature types, particularly those that were formulaic, were more amenable to change as a result of instruction than others (Bouton, 1994, 1999). However Bouton's use of the test was summative and his research did not invite participants to reflect on the reasons for their responses, or explore the obstacles that stood in the way of their learning.

Terminology for the discussion of implicature has evolved since the time Bouton's papers were written. Like Levinson (1983) Bouton uses *violating* as an umbrella term for all non-observance, and does not distinguish between a covert breach and overt *flouting*. He uses *relation* and *relevance* interchangeably and neither *infringing* nor *opting out* of the co-operative principle was included in his data set. His examples involve receptive use only, and his studies used quantitative methodology. Other than the time of residence in the L2 culture and placement in broad groups according to linguistic/cultural backgrounds, there was no consideration of individual learner factors or responses.

## The inferencing task: Adaptation and classroom application

The task was used to evaluate the impact of the prior awareness-raising sessions on ability to infer implicature, to provoke discussion and to allow learners to become more aware of individual areas of potential communicative difficulty. It consisted of 15 items covering breaches of the four Gricean maxims as well as implied sequencing and scalar implicature. In this paper, length constraints preclude the discussion of all the test items. Ten of the items will be considered, involving the maxims of quality, quantity and relation. These three areas have been selected because the cultural issues that arose in the learners' interpretations were the most interesting. Intentional breaches of the maxim of manner seem comparatively rare and as the other forms of implicature were considered to be of limited cross cultural interest they had not been a major focus of the teaching program.

The multiple choice task was completed individually, with no restriction on the time allowed. The follow-up activity involved a class discussion of the reasons why some questions had proven to be difficult. A qualitative descriptive approach was taken, and as the follow-up discussion was not a rigidly structured task and no written responses were produced, the results are considered in terms of group responses rather than individual performance. All comments quoted below are drawn from the researchers' field notes.

## Results

Despite the extensive preparation the learners had had for this activity, their responses did not consistently conform to the 'suggested' answers. In the 10 questions that will be discussed in this paper, the overall 'success rate' (as a percentage of correct responses) for the group was only 56%.

The following section will deal in turn with four areas in which interesting issues arose:

- the maxim of quality: irony
- the maxim of quantity: understated negative evaluation
- the maxim of relation
- responses to obvious questions: "pope questions"

As the following discussion will demonstrate, all of these present potential hazards for pragmatic failure.

***[a] Flouting the maxim of quality: irony***

Grice (1975) identifies four instances in which the maxim of quality can be flouted: irony, metaphor, meiosis (deliberate understatement), and hyperbole (deliberate exaggeration). He acknowledges that more than one of these can be combined in the one utterance, such as the speaker who says, for example, "you're the cream in my coffee" while meaning the opposite.

The first item was used by Bouton in the original 1988 study and the follow-up, where it is referred to by him as a "violation of the maxim of relevance" (1994, p. 163). The 1988 study had identified it, in closer agreement with Grice's well known example (1975, p. 53) of the "fine friend", as ironic flouting of the maxim of quality.

**(Example 1)**

> Bill and Peter have been friends since they were children. They shared a house when they were students and travelled together after graduation. Now friends have told Bill that they saw Peter dancing with Bill's wife while Bill was away on business.
>
> Bill: Peter knows how to be a really good friend, doesn't he?
>
> *Which of the following best says what Bill meant?*

Responses from the cohort are shown below. Of most interest in this study are the dispreferred answers and why they were chosen.

**Table 1. Responses from the Cohort, Example 1**

| **Possible response** | **Learner preferred response** |
|---|---|
| (a) Peter is not acting the way a good friend should. | 5 |
| (b) Peter and Bill's wife are becoming really good friends while Bill is away. | 1 |
| (c) Peter is a good friend and so Bill can trust him. | 2 |
| (d) Nothing should be allowed to interfere with their friendship. | 1 |

[Example topic originally proposed by Grice (1975, p. 53), scenario and multiple choice questions, Bouton, (1988, pp. 185, 193-194; 1994, p. 163)]

If the relationship of friendship and fidelity can be assumed, then the expected answer to this question is (a), a clear example of irony by flouting of the Gricean maxim of quality. Bill finds himself in a situation where he could be expected to be suspicious of Peter, and yet says he knows how to behave like a good friend, therefore this statement incorporates a deliberate reversal of evaluation (Partington, 2007) intended to be noticed by the hearer.

When Bouton used this item in a follow-up study of uninstructed learning, over 85% of Americans, but only half of the NNS, chose (a). This was an increase from the 33% of the NNS who had selected the expected option in the 1988 sampling, but was nevertheless a significant difference. As Bouton noted: "On both occasions, those NNS who did not choose (a) . . . chose (c), which seems to be based on an entirely different attitude towards marriage and friendship" (1994, p. 163).

As outlined above, before completing this task the learners had been shown examples of irony, had taken part in a class discussion and been invited to write a homework activity on cultural attitudes to implicature. (Details of these activities are provided in appendices A and B.) However, comments from the four learners who selected other answers suggested they had been confused by a general unfamiliarity with the situation. One male Indian student remarked said that a person would simply never take advantage of the wife of a friend—it was unthinkable that this could occur. Another was unsure of what the 'dancing' actually implied, and again different cultural behaviours in dance do not necessarily entail the same degree of intimacy between couples.

The choice of lexis and structure are important in how subtle or obvious irony is intended to be. Learners were asked what would have made Bill's utterance less ambiguous, and in the resulting discussion the class had the chance to consider what their responses might have been to alternative language forms and contextual and phonological cues. Thus: *Peter <u>really</u> knows how to be a good friend, <u>doesn't he?</u>* would perhaps be more likely to convey irony than simply *Peter knows how to be a good friend*. A greater use of hyperbole would provide even more intensity.

> *Well, Peter is just someone you could trust with your life, isn't he?*
>
> *Huh, that Peter! The epitome of trustworthiness, the best mate a man ever had . . .*

The choice of an ironic rather than a direct statement has an interpersonal meaning that is not acknowledged in Boutons' work; it tells us something about the speaker, Bill, and his relationship with the unknown hearer. Developing learners' understanding of when, why, and with whom a person chooses to speak ironically is an area worthy of further exploration in the teaching of pragmatics, and teachers would benefit from the availability of more sophisticated and culturally informed teaching resources in order to achieve this aim.

The next item was also classified by Bouton as irony, but realised in a different way.

**(Example 2)**

> At a recent party, there was a lot of singing and piano playing. At one point, Sue played the piano while Mary sang. When Tom asked a friend what Mary had sung, the friend said:
>
> Friend: I'm not sure, but Sue was playing 'My Wild Irish Rose.'
>
> *Which of the following is the closest to what Tom's friend meant by this remark?*

**Table 2. Responses from the Cohort, Example 2**

| | |
|---|---|
| (a) He was only interested in Sue and did not listen to Mary. | 4 |
| (b) Mary sang very badly. | 6 |
| (c) Mary and Sue were not doing the same song. | 1 |
| (d) The song that Mary sang was 'My Wild Irish Rose.' | 0 |

[Scenario and multiple choice questions, Bouton (1988, p. 191)]

The cultural context of singing and piano playing at a party is probably even less familiar to many learners now than it was when this item was designed, and as such the inferred meaning may be less readily comprehensible, particularly in the absence of phonological and paralinguistic cues. It is also more complex in the amount of information that must be processed to understand it: firstly that 'My Wild Irish Rose' is a song; secondly that it is theoretically possible for a person to sing so badly that it is indistinguishable which song they are singing (although this is unlikely to be literally true.)

In Bouton's (1988) study, the NS preferred answer was *(b), Mary sang very badly*. In this study around half the learners came to that conclusion. In the follow-up discussion several of the learners argued strongly that the hyperbole was too farfetched; that it was a more credible scenario that a hearer (male) would focus on the woman who had caught his interest and would indicate his disinterest in the other (presumably less attractive one) by ignoring what she said or did. As one learner commented: 'He only had eyes for Sue'.

***[b] Flouting the maxim of quantity: Understated negative evaluation***

This type of implicature is created when a person is asked directly for an opinion about a person, object or action that they do not like, and not wishing to criticise directly, they reply with a favourable comment about a non-central attribute. A breach of this kind may be *flouting*, the intention being to create an implicature, or *violating*, in which the speaker intends to conceal the fact that he or she can find nothing more complimentary

to say. The models already given to the learners were the well-known scenario of Jones's essay, which was described by one academic to another as 'well typed', and the letter of recommendation describing an employee as 'punctual'. These were readily understood and reported to be commonly used in all the cultures represented in the group. However the items designed by Bouton proved to be more challenging for the learners.

**(Example 3)**

> Two friends are looking over the various kinds of food at an international supper and trying to decide which kinds to try.
>
> Nida: There are so many different kinds of food here that I can't decide which to take first. Which do you recommend?
>
> Trixie: So far I've only had some of that one – the yellow one with the reddish sauce. Certainly is colorful, isn't it?
>
> *Is Trixie recommending the dish to Nida? How do you know?*

**Table 3. Responses from the Cohort, Example 3**

| | |
|---|---|
| (a) No, because Trixie talked only about how the dish looked, not about how it tasted. | 3 |
| (b) Yes, because dishes that are colorful and attractive usually taste good. | 3 |
| (c) No, because Trixie hasn't tried any other dishes to compare the colorful one with. | 4 |
| (d) Yes, since Trixie mentioned the dish, we know she thinks it's good. | 1 |

[Scenario and multiple choice questions, Bouton (1988, p. 185)]

The responses to this question varied widely, with only three respondents selecting Bouton's preferred answer [a]. One confounding factor here may be the length and amount of information in Trixie's response. In this example there are two separate items of information that must be processed: *'So far I've only had some of the yellow one with the reddish sauce'* which qualifies the status of the information she may be able to provide, and *'certainly is colorful, isn't it?'* the comment from which her opinion may be inferred. Again, the lack of discourse phonology deprives the reader of information which would help to distinguish which of the two is central to the interpretation.

Certainly, to the Western ear, referring to food as 'the yellow one with the reddish sauce' rather than by its content (chicken, beef, vegetables) could be interpreted as mildly derisive; it can hardly be complimentary to imply that the content of the food was not identifiable. The three students who selected option (c) were all from Indian backgrounds and, as one of them remarked, the significance of colour in judgement of the quality of food may not be the same in all contexts. The choice of such a culturally

ambiguous attribute as a vehicle for the delivery of faint praise introduces an additional layer of complexity to the question.

Faint praise of a third party (whether Jones's essay or the international food) is inclusive of the hearer and the implied meaning is usually meant to be understood. The situation is different when the hearer or some aspect of their behavior, property or performance is the subject of evaluation. If offence or confrontation is to be avoided, then a margin is left for the hearer to misinterpret what is said, (or a face-saving option to feign non-comprehension) and non-observance of the maxim of quantity usually takes the form of a violation. It is also well documented that that there may be very different cultural responses to the sanctity of frankness (Wierzbicka, 2003). There are indeed occasions where a polite untruth may be the most appropriate response, but many English speakers would feel compromised if they breached the maxim of quality with a direct lie. This is shown in example 4 below.

**(Example 4)**

> Brenda and Sally have lunch every Tuesday. As they meet on this particular day, Brenda stops, twirls like a fashion model, and the following dialogue occurs:
>
> Brenda: I just got a new dress. How do you like it?
>
> Sally: Well, there certainly are a lot of women wearing it this year. When did you get it?
>
> *How does Sally like Brenda's new dress?*

**Table 4. Responses from the Cohort, Example 4**

| | |
|---|---|
| (a) We can't tell from what she says. | 1 |
| (b) She thinks Brenda has good taste in clothes because she's right in fashion. | 0 |
| (c) She likes the dress, but too many women are wearing it. | 5 |
| (d) She doesn't like it. | 4 |

[Scenario and multiple choice questions, Bouton (1988, p. 194)]

The fact that this type of interaction is fundamentally different to the one of lecturers discussing the work of an absent student is not acknowledged by Bouton, although the differences in frequency of expected responses obtained by NS and NNS respondents in his data, (64: 43% respectively), attest to its greater difficulty.

Once its relevance has been established, there are two possible interpretations of Sally's response. *'Well, there certainly are a lot of women wearing it this year'* could mean firstly that the dress is fashionable (good) or too common (bad). Less than half of the group

chose the expected answer, with its implied interpretation (common = bad). This may be attributable to the phrasing of the question, which asks respondents to identify Brenda's real opinion, rather than what she is trying to convey to her friend. The layers of complexity in this example which limited its usefulness as a research tool provided ample opportunity for cross cultural awareness-raising in the classroom context, particularly varying expectations regarding truthfulness and tact.

***[c] Flouting of the maxim of relation***

Several questions were included in which a seemingly irrelevant remark was made in order to generate an implicature. The first was used in unmodified form from Bouton's test battery, and was relatively unproblematic.

**(Example 5)**

> Two roommates are talking. One has just been talking on the telephone to a woman that he was going to take to see a play.
>
> David: Darn it! Mandy just broke our date for the play. Now I've got two tickets for Saturday night and no one to go with.
>
> Mark: Hey, David. Have you ever met my sister? She's coming down to see me this weekend.
>
> David: No, I don't think so. Why?
>
> *What was Mark's reason for mentioning that his sister was coming?*

**Table 5. Responses from the Cohort, Example 5**

| | |
|---|---|
| (a) Mark is just thinking ahead to the weekend and can't remember whether David has met his sister or not. | 0 |
| (b) There is nothing Mark can do to help his friend, so he is mentioning a problem of his own. | 1 |
| (c) Mark is suggesting that David take Mark's sister to the play. | 9 |
| (d) Mark wants to be sure that David knows that the woman he is with this weekend is his sister and not a new girlfriend. | 1 |

[Scenario and multiple choice questions, Bouton (1988, p. 191)]

Nine of 11 learners successfully interpreted this implicature, one offering the explanation that making a direct suggestion, like "Why don't you take my sister instead?" would be a potential face threat. This provided an opportunity for a cross cultural examination of how much a person could impose in a friendship—a revisiting of the concept of positive and negative politeness, (Brown & Levinson, 1987) and the ways in

which cultures could favour solidarity or deference politeness. (Wierzbicka, 2003). The learner who selected answer (d) volunteered the explanation that in his culture it was uncomfortable for a man being seen in the company of a woman who was not known to be a member of his family—that it could cause gossip and diminish his social standing. As such, it was his response to the specific topic and context which made it difficult for him to interpret the intended implicature.

One feature which could have rendered this question more difficult than some of the others is the response made in the third move by the interlocutor, which could indicate that either he has genuinely not understood the implicature or wishes to create the impression of not having understood it. Bouton's reason for choosing this, or for a general lack of consistency in response slots across the sample, is not clear. Although the multiple choice responses in Boutons' studies were generated empirically this was not the case with the scenarios and opening utterances. As noted above, it is a challenge for quantitative researchers to create scenarios that do not have hidden complexities and are of genuinely comparable difficulty.

The inconsistency of the items in terms of the absence or presence of a response slot could also have influenced the results in examples 6 and 7. Again, these were taken in unaltered form from Bouton's test battery.

**(Example 6)**

> When Abe got home, he found that his wife had to use a walking stick in order to walk.
>
> Abe: What happened to your leg?
>
> Wife: I went jogging.
>
> *Another way Abe's wife could have said the same thing is . . .*

**Table 6. Responses from the Cohort, Example 6**

| | |
|---|---|
| (a) Today I finally got some exercise jogging. | 0 |
| (b) I hurt it jogging. | 8 |
| (c) It's nothing serious. Don't worry about it. | 0 |
| (d) I hurt it doing something silly. | 3 |

[Scenario and multiple choice questions, Bouton (1988, p. 185; 1994, p. 165)]

In this example, the subject matter seemed superficially to offer less opportunity for confusion, but clearly personal perceptions and values as well as language limitations can influence the interpretation of implicatures. One of the learners who selected

response (d) was of the opinion that jogging was silly, while another made a guess because she was unsure of the meaning of the word.

The next relation-breach question had to be slightly adapted in order to match the southern hemisphere climate. Seven of 11 learners interpreted the implicature in line with expectations.

**(Example 7)**

> Susan and Mei-ling are students sharing a flat in Sydney and are getting ready to go to class together.
>
> Mei-ling: Is it very cold out this morning?
>
> Susan: It's December.
>
> *What is Susan saying?*

**Table 7. Responses from the Cohort, Example 7**

| | |
|---|---|
| (a) It'll be nice and warm today. Don't worry. | 7 |
| (b) Yes, even though it's December, it's very cold out. | 2 |
| (c) It's so warm for this time of year that it seems like December. | 2 |
| (d) Yes, we're sure having crazy weather, aren't we? | 0 |

[Scenario and multiple choice questions, Bouton (1988, p. 194), Roever (2007, p. 187)]

Roever (2007) used a very similar item in his study of study of differential item functioning; the investigation of instances when a test item confers an advantage on one group of test takers over another. This item appeared to advantage the German reference group in comparison to the East and South East Asian focal group. Roever was unable to identify a definite reason, but speculates: "It is possible that the item content (referring to August weather in southern California) may have confused local group test takers in some way" (2007, p. 183).

In the classroom, the extra processing load resulting from a lack of familiarity with the context may have explained the increased prevalence of non-standard responses. The adaptation was actually counterproductive, as several learners from the northern hemisphere commented that they were more confused by the amended seasonal reference. The lack of a response slot in Bouton's original test item could also have increased the difficulty of this question. Also, the absence of phonological cues indicating impatience or exasperation could also have been a more significant factor in this example than it was in the others, as there was little other contextual evidence to suggest the speaker was intending to convey annoyance.

It could also be argued that the item was confusing because of a mismatch in the low level of implied benevolence in Susan's answer, and the multiple choice paraphrase, which incorporated a supportive 'Don't worry'. When asked to comment on what was happening in this exchange, most saw genuine reassurance. Only one student volunteered 'ask a silly question, get a silly answer'.

For primary and secondary teachers, who are regularly asked "silly questions" by learners with a range of motivations, this particular type of implicature was highly salient. The inability to distinguish between an utterance that is gently cajoling or bitingly sarcastic can have a long term negative impact on teacher-student and other workplace relationships. This was exactly the kind of pragmatic competence issue that had been mentioned by the school principals when the PEAT was designed.

Generating a set of obvious or 'silly' questions that a teacher might be asked, recording spontaneous verbal responses and then exploring the match between speaker intent and both the lexicogrammatical and phonological features of their rejoinders could provide the opportunity for these student to notice and possibly pre-empt serious pragmatic failure.

A different reason for flouting the maxim of relation occurs in the next example, adapted by Roever (2006) from Bouton (1999), and concerning the degree of certainty with which a piece of information is known to be true.

**(Example 8)**

Jack is talking to his housemate Sarah about another housemate, Frank.

Jack: 'Do you know where Frank is, Sarah?'

Sarah: 'Well, I heard music from his room earlier.'

*What does Sarah probably mean?*

**Table 8. Responses from the Cohort, Example 8**

| | |
|---|---|
| (a) Frank forgot to turn the music off. | 2 |
| (b) Frank's loud music bothers Sarah. | 0 |
| (c) Frank is probably in his room. | 8 |
| (d) Sarah doesn't know where Frank is. | 2 |

[Scenario and questions, Roever (2006, p. 238; 2007, p. 167)]

The same maxim is flouted as in examples 5-7 but the interpersonal meaning is quite different. When Sarah commences her utterance with a hedging 'well' it could be taken as an indication of the possibility of ignorance, which points to a clash of maxims. If

Sarah has genuine doubts about the status of her knowledge, she may be choosing to deliberately flout the maxim of relation rather than risk breaching the maxim of quality. Without any phonological evidence of the manner in which 'well' is said, it becomes difficult to distinguish between these two possibilities.

There are cultural variations in the amount of certainty required before a piece of information can be directly stated (Keenan, 1976) and the loss of face that may be incurred when a speaker oversteps the boundary of certain knowledge. These may well have influenced the decision of two of these learners, one Japanese and one Korean, who stated that they had chosen option (d) because Sarah had not indicated that she knew for sure where Frank was. A confirming response from Jack might have reduced the range of possible interpretations. However, the flaw in the clarity of the example actually presented a useful opportunity for an exploration of the differential cultural attitudes to certainty. From a learning perspective the importance of this is not the actual generalisations made by learners about their own cultures (which may or may not have been accurate) but the fact that they became aware that this was a point where different perspectives could potentially exist.

The next question also involved the maxim of relation but differed in that a confirmation move was included. Eight of 10 responses corresponded to the expected answer.

**(Example 9)**

Frank wanted to know what time it was, but he didn't have a watch.

Frank: What time is it, Helen?

Helen: The postman has been here.

Frank: Okay. Thanks.

*What message does Frank probably get from what Helen says?*

**Table 9. Responses from the Cohort, Example 9**

| | |
|---|---|
| (a) She is telling him approximately what time it is by telling him that the postman has already been there. | 8 |
| (b) By changing the subject, Helen is telling Frank that she doesn't know what time it is. | 1 |
| (c) She thinks that Frank should stop what he is doing and read his mail. | 1 |
| (d) Frank will not be able to interpret any message from what Helen says, since she did not answer his question. | |

[Scenario and multiple choice questions, Bouton (1994, p. 165)]

Only half as many learners misinterpreted this implicature, which may have been less ambiguous because it contained additional information of Franks' satisfied response. Of course in the absence of phonological evidence it might still be possible to read irony into Frank's utterance.

Option (b), in which the subject is changed in order to avoid admitting ignorance, was only chosen by one student. Admission of ignorance was reported by this student to be a more serious issue in some East Asian contexts than in Western contexts, and it was volunteered by several members of the group that their understanding of this type of implicature could be influenced by that. Thus, as in the previous example, this item provided a useful opportunity for crystallising cross-cultural insights, and an entry into a review of the language of mitigation and hedging. Learners explored how relationships can be damaged when pragmatic transfer leads to the projection of too much or too little certainty. This was particularly relevant to the Chinese and Indian students who were used to a classroom where the authority, knowledge and certainty of the teacher were seen as beyond question.

***[d] 'Pope Questions." Appraising a request for information***

In the type of relevance-based implicature which Bouton has labelled 'pope' questions, (POPE-Q) after the prototypical example 'Is the Pope a Catholic?' a seemingly unrelated response is applied in order to indicate (usually in a good-natured way) that a question has been asked to which the answer is very obvious.

Roever (2006, 2007) reports differential item functioning on this type of item, with the German background learners performing better than the Asian group.

**(Example 10)**

> Two roommates are talking about what they are going to do during the summer.
>
> Fran: My mother wants me to stay home and entertain the relatives when they come to visit us at the beach.
>
> Joan: Do you have a lot of relatives?
>
> Fran: Does a dog have fleas?

*How can we best interpret Fran's comment?*

**Table 10. Responses from the Cohort, Example 10**

| | |
|---|---|
| (a) Fran thinks her relatives are boring. | 1 |
| (b) Fran doesn't have very many relatives. | 4 |
| (c) Fran does have a lot of relatives. | 6 |
| (d) Fran is asking Joan if a dog usually has fleas. | 0 |

[Scenario, Bouton (1988, p. 191) Roever (2006, p. 7). See also Bouton (1994, p. 162), with variation in scenario and different multiple choice responses.]

In the teaching session preceding this task, learners had been exposed to the concept of a pope question, although they had not seen this specific example. While no learners chose the literal response, indicating they recognised that an implicature of some kind had been generated, their choices were varied. Subsequent discussions revealed that cultural and linguistic background knowledge factors were important here, as the question was less transparent than the original pope example. The scenario itself was unfamiliar, and one Chinese student noted that in highly family-oriented cultures it would be a marked case for a young person to speak disparagingly of their relatives. Lexical and experiential issues also intervened. Some learners were unsure of what fleas were, others were unconvinced that it was 'usual' for dogs to have them.

Understanding the implicature in pope questions is a two-step process—that of recognising that these sorts of questions exist at all, and secondly recognising the self-evident truth or absurdity of the specific example, which relies on shared cultural assumptions. In fact, Bouton (1988 and 1994) presents two variants of the 'many relatives' question, one in which the response was 'Are there flies in the summer?', and clearly local cultural factors will influence the difficulty of comprehending the meaning.

Pope questions tend to be formulaic and highly culturally bound. For example, the British expression 'Do bears s*** in the woods?' was unfamiliar to the author at the time of this project, and culturally less accessible in Australia where 'woods' are referred to as 'forest' or 'bush' and do not contain bears. Nevertheless, because of the choice of interrogative structure and the incompatibility of its content with the co-text, the speaker's meaning would have been retrievable to her.

Interestingly, another example in which the question was "Can a duck swim?" was answered correctly by all of the learners. Developing sensitivity to the interpersonal impact of a pope question was also shown by one learner who referred back to the rejoinder in example 7, "It's December", which she spontaneously suggested might be called a "pope answer".

Although none were included in this task, negative pope questions also occur in authentic discourse. Comprehension of pope questions involves knowing whether or not the statement in the rhetorical question is true. For example, the expression "Do pigs fly?" would generate the opposite implicature to those in example 10. A tool for the assessment of the ability to interpret these should probably include both types.

The actual production of pope questions was not an important learning goal for the learners in the classroom reported in this study, and probably inadvisable in the test and workplace contexts. More important here, and probably in the majority of teaching contexts, was comprehension of typical forms and a broadening of cultural knowledge about their use. Responses which incorporate an implicit appraisal of the question are not uncommon in classroom contexts. As a result of this session, the learners were

probably more likely to notice how Australian teachers respond to questions from their learners, and were better equipped to note instances of flouting of the maxim of relation in classroom and playground discourse.

## Discussion

This case study involved a small sample of NNS teachers in a real learning context, and was informed by, but did not set out to replicate or challenge the quantitative studies of Carrell (1979), Bouton (1988, 1994, 1999), and Roever (2004, 2005, 2006, 2007). The decision to use published test items which had been extensively trialled and validated for a purpose different to that for which they were designed led to some interesting results.

Taken at face value, as an assessment of the effectiveness of the teaching of pragmatics, the results of the research-based multiple choice DCT would seem to indicate that limited learning had taken place. However, the teachers were readily able to apply their understanding of Gricean pragmatics to a post hoc analysis of their responses to the task. Interestingly, the difficulties that arose were not so much related to knowledge of pragmatics but more to the limitations that were identified in the chosen assessment tool. Some, but not all of these were related to cultural assumptions. It suggests that although pragmatic competence requires a basis in knowledge of how to use and interpret language, gaps in background cultural knowledge will cause problems even if the linguistic knowledge is there. Indeed, one of the most significant obstacles to assessing the effectiveness of the teaching of pragmatics has been the development of culturally appropriate ways of assessing pragmatic competence, and this study has shed new light on why it is so difficult to achieve.

This study has focussed on ways of developing the pragmatic competence of NNS teachers in order to facilitate their work in Australian primary and secondary schools. Although the concepts taught were potentially transferable to the classrooms of the language teachers in the cohort, it was beyond the scope of the study to directly investigate the application of the NNS teachers' developing pragmatic competence in their own teaching. However, this area is clearly deserving of attention. Further ethnographic research would extend our knowledge of implicature in the classroom and other workplace sites and help to identify instances in which both teachers' and students' lack of pragmatic competence leads to communication breakdown.

The question of how much, and specifically what, linguistic theory and metalanguage should be applied in the classroom is also an important one. While giving advanced learners access to concepts such as the co-operative principle means they are able to discuss how and when it is manifest in communication and deal with issues such as limitations on its cultural universality, the field of pragmatics is very complex and reaching a functional level of metapragmatic literacy is time-consuming. The knowledge base of TESOL professionals is also a limiting factor, as little attention is usually given to pragmatics in teacher education. (Vásquez & Sharpless, 2009). Clearly, the potential of

explicit knowledge for the developing teacher, NNS or NS, merits further attention and research.

The study also raised questions about the relationship of pragmatic comprehension and production. Should learners who are preparing to become classroom teachers be encouraged to suppress their cultural intuitions of appropriacy, use risky idiomatic formulae involving popes and bears, damn with faint praise, and employ sarcastic rejoinders? The answer for most of this group was probably no, because other features of their language would make these familiar NS utterances counter to the expectations of the hearer and may lead to confusion, highly counterproductive in a pre-employment testing situation. But the question that needs to be asked is: which is worse, risking pragmatic failure or coming to terms with permanent alterity? In order to enter and function in the educational workplace, they urgently need to understand implicature but at what point do they obtain the right to use the full range of language resources and be free at last from the enforced childhood of pragmatic interlanguage? And furthermore, what can lead NNS teachers to feel sufficiently empowered to apply their pragmatic knowledge directly in their own teaching?

Finally, there was the question of published material for the assessment of pragmatic competence and its adaptation as a teaching resource. Recent work on the teaching and testing of pragmatics is moving more in the direction of multimedia resources and the reduction of ambiguity (LoCastro, 2003; Yates, 2004; Dufon, 2004). The lack of clarity of many of Bouton's examples could well have been avoided if audio or video materials had been used, but in the teaching context discussed in this paper the coexistence of multiple interpretations turned out to be highly beneficial. It helped to make learners more aware that all communication takes place on multiple levels simultaneously and that there is always a potential for unintended (or at times deliberate) mismatches between a speaker's meaning and a hearer's understanding.

The learners described in this study were led to examine how an utterance which was slightly different in terms of lexicogrammar or phonology might have been interpreted, and how factors in the context could influence both choices and their interpretation. The question they were encouraged to ask were: 'Why was *that* said and not something else?' and 'What might have been the result if a different choice had been made?' It would be interesting to explore this in more detail and depth than the current teaching context permitted.

As has been shown throughout this paper, in this study the assessment tool proved to be far from ideal for the task to which it was applied, but provided unexpected opportunities for extending and deepening learning. It is clear that we should not wait for perfection to be achieved in instructional or assessment resources for pragmatics in teacher education; a great deal can be achieved with what already exists. In the words of Leonard Cohen (not an applied linguist but whose wisdom is nonetheless applicable to teachers and teacher educators): "*There is a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in.*"

## About the Author

Jill Murray is a lecturer at Macquarie University, where she teaches undergraduate and post-graduate programs in TESOL and applied linguistics. Prior to this she worked in ELT, community language maintenance and teacher education. Her research interests include teacher professional development, language assessment and the teaching and learning of pragmatics.

## References


Alcón Soler, E. (2005). Does instruction work for learning pragmatics in the foreign language context? *System 33* (3), 417-435.

Bardovi-Harlig, K. (2001). Evaluating the empirical evidence: Grounds for instruction in pragmatics? In K. R. Rose & G. Kasper (Eds.), *Pragmatics in language teaching* (pp. 13–32). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Blight, R. (2002). Classroom procedure for explicit instruction in conversational implicature. *JALT conference proceedings* . Available: http://jalt-publications.org/archive/proceedings/2002/142.pdf.

Bouton, L.F. (1988). A cross-cultural study of ability to interpret implicatures in English. *World Englishes, 17*(2), 183–96.

Bouton, L.F. (1994). Conversational implicature in the second language: Learned slowly when not deliberately taught. *Journal of Pragmatics, 22*, 157–67.

Bouton, L. F. (1999). Developing non-native speaker skills in interpreting conversational implicatures in English: Explicit teaching can ease the process. In E. Hinkel (Ed.): *Culture in second language teaching and learning* (pp. 47-70). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Bromberek-Dyzman K., & Ewert, A. (2010) Figurative competence is better developed in L1 than L2, or is it? Understanding conversational implicatures in L1 and L2. In M. Putz, & L. Sicola, (Eds.) *Cognitive processing in second language acquisition: inside the learner's mind* (pp. 317-334). Amsterdam, The Netherlands: John Benjamins.

Brown, P. & Levinson, S. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Carrell, P. (1979). Indirect speech acts in ESL: Indirect answers. In C. Yorio, K. Perkins, & J. Schachter (Eds.), *On TESOL '79: The learner in focus* (pp. 297-307). Washington, DC: TESOL.

Cohen, A. D. (2004). Assessing speech acts in a second language. In D. Boxer & A. D. Cohen (Eds.), *Studying speaking to inform second language learning* (pp. 302-327). Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.

Cohen, A.D. & Ishihara, N. (2005). *A web-based approach to strategic learning of speech acts.* Accessed 1.4.2006. Available:

http://www.carla.umn.edu/speechacts/Japanese%20Speech%20Act%20Report%20Rev.%20June05.pdf.

Cohen, L. (1992). *Anthem.* Sony/ATV Music Publishing.

Crandall, E. & Basturkmen, H. (2004). Evaluating pragmatics-focused materials. *ELT Journal, 58*(1), 38–49.

DuFon, M. (2004). Producing a video for teaching pragmatics in the second or foreign language classroom. *Prospect, 19*(1), 65-83.

Eslami-Rasekh, Z. (2005). Raising the pragmatic awareness of language learners. *ELT Journal, 59* (2), 199-208.

Eslami-Rasekh, Z., Eslami-Rasekh. A., & Fatahi, A. (2004). The effect of explicit metapragmatic instruction on the speech act awareness of advanced EFL students. *TESL-EJ, 8*(2) Available: http://www.tesl-ej.org/wordpress/issues/volume8/ej30/ej30a2/.

Golato, A. (2003). Studying compliment responses: A comparison of DCTs and recordings of naturally occurring talk. *Applied Linguistics, 24*(1), 90-121.

Grice, P. (1975). Logic and conversation. In P. Cole, & J. L. Morgan (Eds.), *Syntax and semantics* (Vol 3, Speech acts) (pp. 41-58) New York, NY: Academic Press.

Hall, E. T. (1990). *Understanding cultural differences: Germans, French and Americans*. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press.

Hofstede, G. (1980). *Culture's consequences: International differences in work related values.* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

House, J. (1996). Developing pragmatic fluency in English as a foreign language: Routines and metapragmatic awareness. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 18*(2), 225–252.

Jeon, E. H. & Kaya, T. (2006). Effects of L2 instruction on interlanguage pragmatic development: A meta-analysis. In J. M. Norris & L. Ortega (Eds.), *Synthesizing research on language learning and teaching* (pp. 165–211). New York, NY: John Benjamins.

Kasper, G. (2007). Pragmatics in Second Language Learning: An update *Language Learning Roundtable, American Association for Applied Linguistics Annual Conference.* Accessed 7.7.2008: http://www.aaal.org/index.php?id=53.

Keenan, E. O. (1976). The universality of conversational postulates. *Language in Society, 5*(1), 67-79.

Koike, D. A. (1989). Pragmatic competence and adult L2 acquisition: Speech acts in interlanguage. *Modern Language Journal, 73*(3), 279-89.

Kubota, M. (1995). Teachability of conversational implicatures to Japanese EFL learners. *IRLT* , *5*, 35-67.

Lee, J. S. (2002). Interpreting conversational implicatures: A study of Korean learners of English, *The Korea TESOL journal*, *5*, 1-25

Leech, G. N. (1983). *Principles of Pragmatics*. London, UK: Longman.

Levinson, S. (1983). *Pragmatics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Liddicoat, A., & Crozet, C. (2001). Acquiring French interactional norms through instruction. In K. R. Rose & G. Kasper (Eds.) *Pragmatics in language teaching* (pp. 125–144). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

LoCastro, V. (1997). Pedagogical intervention and pragmatic competence development. *Applied Language Learning 8*, 75–109.

Lo Castro, V. (2003). *An introduction to pragmatics: Social action for language teachers*. Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press.

Murray, J. C. (2009). Teaching pragmatics for test preparation. In A. M. Stoke (Ed.): *JALT 2008 conference proceedings*. Tokyo: JALT.

Murray, N. (2010). Pragmatics, awareness raising and the co-operative principle *ELT Journal, 64*(3), 293-301

Partington, A. (2007). Irony and reversal of evaluation. *Journal of Pragmatics, 39* (9), 1547-1599.

Roever, C. (2004). Difficulty and practicality in tests of interlanguage pragmatics. In D. Boxer & A. Cohen (Eds.), *Studying speaking to inform language learning* (pp. 283–301). Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters,

Roever, C. (2005). *Testing ESL Pragmatics: Development and validation of a web-based assessment battery.* Berlin, Germany: Peter Lang.

Roever, C. (2006). Validation of a web-based test of ESL pragmalinguistics. *Language Testing, 23*(2), 229-256.

Roever, C. (2007). DIF in the assessment of second language pragmatics. *Language Assessment Quarterly, 4(2),* 165-189.

Rose, K.R. (2005). On the effects of instruction in second language pragmatics. *System, 33*, 385-399.

Rose, K. R., & Ng. C. (2001). Inductive and deductive teaching of compliments and compliment responses. In K. R. Rose & G. Kasper (Eds.), *Pragmatics in language teaching* (pp. 145-170). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Salazar, P.C. (2003). Pragmatic instruction in the EFL context. In A. Martínez-Flor, E. Usó, & A. Fernández. (Eds.), *Pragmatic competence and foreign language teaching* (pp. 233–246). Castellón, Spain: Servei de Publicacions de la Universitat Jaume I.

Schmidt, R. (1993). Awareness and second language acquisition. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 13*, 206-226.

Takahashi, S. (2001). The role of input enhancement in developing pragmatic competence. In K.R. Rose & G. Kasper (Eds.), *Pragmatics in language teaching* (pp. 171–199). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Takahashi, S. (2005). Noticing in task performance and learning outcomes: a qualitative analysis of instructional effects in interlanguage pragmatics. *System 33 (3),* 437-461.

Tateyama, Y. (2001). Explicit and implicit teaching of pragmatics routines: Japanese sumimasen. In K. R. Rose. & G. Kasper (Eds.), *Pragmatics in language teaching* (pp. 200–222). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Thomas, J. (1983). Cross-cultural pragmatic failure. *Applied Linguistics 4*(2), 91–112.

Thomas, J. (1995). *Meaning in interaction: an introduction to pragmatics*. London, UK: Longman Publishing.

Vásquez, D. & Sharpless, D. (2009). The role of pragmatics in the Masters TESOL curriculum: Findings from a nationwide survey. *TESOL Quarterly, 43*(1), 5-28.

Vellenga, H. (2004). Learning pragmatics from ESL and EFL textbooks: How likely? *TESL-EJ 8(2).* Available: http://www.tesl-ej.org/wordpress/issues/volume8/ej30/ej30a3/.

Wierzbicka, A. (2003). *Cross cultural pragmatics: The semantics of human interaction.* Berlin, NY: Mouton de Gruyter.

Wishnoff, J. (2000). Hedging your bets: L2 learners' acquisition of pragmatic devices in academic writing and computer-mediated discourse. *Second Language Studies, Working Papers of the Department of Second Language Studies, University of Hawaii 19* 119–157.

Yates, L. (2004). The 'secret rules of language': Tackling pragmatics in the classroom. *Prospect: Journal of Australian TESOL, 19*(1), 3-21.

Yoshimi, D. (2001). Explicit instruction and JFL learners' use of interactional discourse markers. In Rose K. R. & G. Kasper (eds.): *Pragmatics in language teaching,* (pp. 223-244). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

---

***APPENDIX A: Teaching materials***

***Introductory discussion prompts:***

***Notes for lecture/discussion: The co-operative principle:***

When people interpret meaning, they assume that the people talking to them are trying to communicate effectively, and they look for meaning in whatever is said.

Grice (in 1975) wrote about the co-operative principle, which says

*'. . . make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged.*

The co-operative principle involves four Maxims.

**Quantity:**

Give the right amount of information:
make your contribution as informative as is required
do not make your contribution more informative than is required

This means – when someone is talking to you, you will usually expect that what they give you is the amount of information that you need – not more or less.

**Quality:** Try to make your contribution one that is true: i.e.
do not say what you believe to be false
do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence

This means – when someone is talking to you, you will usually expect that what they say will be true, to the best of their knowledge.

**Relation:**
Make your contribution relevant:
This means that normally when someone is talking to you, you expect that what they say will be relevant to you.

**Manner:**
Be perspicuous:
avoid obscurity of expression
avoid ambiguity
be brief
be orderly
This means that normally you would not expect that the person you are talking to would be deliberately confusing.

Grice argues that it is only by assuming that people are trying to be cooperative that we can work out how a given utterance is to be interpreted. We do so by assuming that people usually apply these rules in a conversation, and that if they do not, there must be a reason for it.

*"There are times when people say (or write) exactly what they mean, but generally they are not totally explicit. Since, on the other occasions they manage to convey far more than their words mean, or something quite different from the meanings of their words, how on earth do we know, on a given occasion what a speaker means?"* (Thomas 1995: 56)

It's important to stress that the maxims are not "rules that must be followed". They are more an expectation of the most probable behaviour of the people we are communicating with.

**Flouting the maxims**

In some contexts, people deliberately do NOT apply these maxims, in order to create a different meaning. They want the hearer to notice that they are doing it and wonder

why. The meaning that is created is called an implicature.
e.g.

> A: I just crashed my car and lost my wallet and had a fight with my husband.
>
> B: Wow, you had a really great day!

*What do you think the speaker is implying in the following examples?*

[1] Having to do the PEAT is really great fun!

[2] A: What did you think of Mary's essay?

B: It was well typed.

[3] A: When Stan worked with you, what was he like as a colleague?
B: He was always on time.

[4] My car is a real lemon!

*Can you think of an example where the maxim of relation or manner might be deliberately flouted in order to create an implicature?*

**Violating the maxims.**

Sometimes people do not want others to notice they are not applying the maxims. They want to avoid telling the truth without having to tell a deliberate lie.

A: (looking at a broken vase) Did you knock that over?

B: (who had actually dropped the vase and broken it) No.
(strictly true, but not really answering the question. Intended to be misunderstood.)

**Infringing the maxims**

Sometimes people do not observe the maxims because they can't. We call this "infringing" a maxim.

A: (at seven o clock) What's the time?

B: (with very limited English but believing his answer is right) Eight o'clock

**Suspending**

There are genres in which some of the maxims do not apply – for example poetry is not expressed in a clear and simple way (maxim of manner). We call this a "suspension" of a maxim.

**Opting out**

Sometimes people may not wish to provide the response that the other speaker is requesting, or to comment on something they have said. We call this "opting out".

TASK.

Work in groups and use your notes to produce a summary of the main points we have discussed.

Pass your summary to another group for checking. Is there anything missing or incorrect?

SCENARIOS (sample )

Using the diagram with the different types of breaches of the maxims, identify which maxim is being breached and whether it is an example of flouting, violating, infringing, etc.

1. A student says to her friend "I just love it when all my assignments are due in the same week!"

2. The alarm goes off in the library as a student is walking out. The librarian says 'Have you got any unborrowed books in your bag?" The student, who has exceeded his borrowing limit and is trying to smuggle a book out, says "no." The librarian concludes that the alarm must be malfunctioning and waves him through. There is a book inside his shirt.

3. A student says to a teacher: "We have to do a lot of reading for this subject"
The teacher replies "You are in year 12!"

4. Two young girls, Anne and Kylie are gossiping.
Anne "What do you think of that guy Suzie's going out with?"
Kylie "Max? He's a pig"

5. Later Suzie's sister asks Kylie her opinion of Max.
Kylie says, "He's got nice hair "

6. Anne asks her husband "What do you feel like having for dinner?"
He answers "Food".

8. The spy, James Bond, is off on another mission. His girlfriend asks him where he's going. He answers "If I told you that I'm afraid I'd have to kill you"

9. In an ESL class a teacher is asking students about their pets. One student says "I've got a duck." He takes out his wallet and shows a picture of a dog.

10. A colleague shows you her new shoes, which you think are horrible, and asks for your opinion. You reply – "they look great!"

**DISCUSSION TASK:**

1. In what situations in schools do people <u>not</u> say exactly what they mean?

2. Consider this example:

Two teachers are sitting in a staffroom and one of them says "I can't believe what a fool the principal is!" The other one says 'your lunch smells good!"

Is this flouting a maxim? Why do you think so/ not?

When might you give an answer like that?

2. Cultural differences
Do you think people from your cultural background speak more directly or less directly than Australian people?

How do you feel about:

- being truthful to your friends and family.
- always telling the truth to colleagues, students, the principal?

3. Consider the examples of irony discussed in the lecture and scenarios.

Do you think Australian people use irony more or less than people in your culture?

What is the difference between irony and sarcasm?

Do you think it is appropriate to use them in the classroom?

How confident are you that you can interpret people's underlying meanings?
How confident are you that you can make implicatures that other people can understand?

**APPENDIX B:**
***Optional homework exercise and sample student responses***

**1. Implicature: saying what you mean, or not?**
As you go about your life this week, listen to yourself and the people around you. Try to note some examples where people do not speak directly, truth fully, clearly or give the expected amount of information. Your examples may be from real life or TV/ movies etc.

| Context: Where were the speakers? Who were they? | What did they say? (Try to recall the exact words that were used.) | Comment: |
|---|---|---|
| *( Japan)* *A classmate* | *I want to die!* | *It was not true. He just mean he was tired of studying and exams* |

**2. Cultural awareness**

Do you sometimes find you don't understand when people flout or violate the maxims and speak indirectly or ironically, or is it never a problem for you? Do people understand when you do it – or do you not usually do it? Write up to a page about this. Discuss your experiences, opinions and feelings.

**Sample responses:**

*(Japan)*

*I sometimes find out that I don't understand what people say. It doesn't relate to my understanding of English language because I understand that meaning as a language. However I don't understand the real meaning between the lines. . . .*

*When someone talks to me especially ironically I always feel uncomfortable Probably it comes from my cultural background. In my background consideration for other people's feeling is priority than individual feeling. Therefore, before we say something we need to think if it makes people confortable or not. I think ironical speaking isn't harmonised with our culture.*

*(Korea)*

*One of teachers I know him for a few years. When I asked him "Where are you going?' he said 'London" I asked him "what for" and he answered "to see the queen'. I understood that he doesn't want to say about his personal matter. When I met him one hour later I asked "How was London?' He answered "good", "have you seen the queen, I asked?*

*He answered "of course" – with his big smile. . . ."*

*". . . Korean culture is classify as high context culture . . . according to Korean history (5000 years) most Korean think human relationship is most important than any matters. In family they do not say everything but they are expected to understand most things . . . "*

*(Bangladesh)*

*"I always appreciate and value the speaking indirectly or ironically as this is an indirect and humorous way to deliver the message without hurting or pointing to the target people. . . ."*

*". . . Very often I find it difficult to grasp the underlying meanings of the indirect speaking especially in my second or third language but I am quite confident and enjoy speaking this way in my first language. Speaking indirectly and ironically requires an advanced or high level knowledge understanding and conceptual, contextual and in-depth grasping of that particular language."*

Copyright © 1994 - 2011 TESL-EJ, ISSN 1072-4303
Copyright rests with the authors. Please cite TESL-EJ appropriately.