

# Introduction to the EJ Special Issue

**From the Guest Editors, Ali Derakhshan & Andrew Cohen**

Dear Readers,

It is our pleasure to welcome you to this TESL-EJ Special Issue on *Teaching, Learning, Assessing, and Researching L2 Pragmatics in Honor of Prof. Zohreh R. Eslami*. We would like to thank Thomas Robb for affording us the opportunity to serve as guest editors for this special issue.

The lead editor, Ali Derakhshan, has been a colleague of Prof. Zohreh R. Eslami for many years and has co-authored a number of publications with her. He was inspired by her thought-provoking publications on pragmatics while he was a PhD student. This impetus inspired him to write his dissertation on the teachability of speech acts and implicatures. The second editor of the volume, Andrew D. Cohen, first met Prof. Eslami when she attended the 2006 CARLA Summer Institute course on Pragmatics at the University of Minnesota, co-taught by Noriko Ishihara and him. From 2011 to 2014, Cohen served as a consultant on a research project in Qatar, for which she was Co-Principal Investigator. The project under the auspices of Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar was initiated in order to improve the EFL reading strategies of middle-school children reading in science.

Cohen agreed to co-edit this volume as a tribute to Prof. Zohreh R. Eslami, given her amazingly productive record of scholarship representing numerous fields in applied linguistics. This honorary volume is focused on just one of the various fields that her work has impacted over the years, namely, pragmatics. Whereas half of the contributions to this volume are from her colleagues in Iran, it is to be noted that the impact of her work on research and practice dealing with EFL pragmatics has been truly worldwide. Eslami has done extensive research on a number of speech acts, such as apologies, complaints, compliments, invitations, and requests. She has also done research in a number of other areas of pragmatics, such as on forms of address, politeness, research methods, and assessment of pragmatics. In addition, her work has included teacher development studies, wherein the focus has been on preparing instructors for teaching pragmatics and on the extent to which teachers should indulge in explicit metapragmatic instruction. With regard to the learning of pragmatics, she has conducted research on raising pragmatic awareness among learners and on best practices in the learning of pragmatics, with a focus on the nature and extent of contact with the target language.

As a result of expanding travel globally by speakers of a host of languages, pragmatics inevitably plays an ever more valuable role in ensuring successful intercultural communications. In these intercultural contexts, pragmatic competence is not confined to the traditional focus on how EFL/ESL learners might perform a speech act such as requesting or apologizing, but rather encompasses more broadly how these learners and their interlocutors co-construct pragmatic norms according to the needs in the given context. Hence, it becomes imperative to ensure that learners of English become proficient not only linguistically but also pragmatically.

Addressing this desideratum[1], interlanguage pragmatics studies have shown that pragmatic proficiency can be enhanced through explicit instruction. Concomitantly, these studies have underscored that in order for EFL/ESL learners to communicate competently in such an internationalized world, they need to be both sociopragmatically and pragmalinguistically savvy. In other words, they need to know what they can say, when, and to whom, as well as how best to say it in a given situation so as not to cause pragmatic failure.

The aim of this collection of papers is to stimulate the growth of research in the field of L2 pragmatics. Most of the 12 articles in the volume constitute empirical studies in L2 pragmatics. The studies represent a range of languages and contexts worldwide, including America, Africa, Asia, and Europe, and involve both quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method approaches to the exploration of issues that impact the teaching, learning, and assessment of abilities in pragmatics needed for contemporary communication.

In the opening paper, **Kathleen Bardovi-Harlig** and **Yunwen Su** examine the role of L2 and FL contexts in the acquisition of conventional expressions. Their results demonstrate the effect of learning environment on learners' selection of conventional expressions. They found that the ESL group selected the conventional expressions in more items than the EFL group on the aural MC-DCT. They also reported that the observed effect of the learning is context dependent both on the nature of the individual items, as well as on the type and modality of the task. The authors conclude their paper by suggesting a variety of activities for teaching conventional expressions (based on Bardovi-Harlig & Mossman, 2016), and suggest that teachers can increase the learners' awareness of such expressions by showing video-taped vignettes featuring these expressions (Derakhshan & Eslami, 2020).

In the second paper, **Ali Dabbagh** and **Esmat Babai** report on an investigation of experienced and novice nonnative speakers' (NNSs) criteria in scoring multiple-rejoinder written discourse completion tasks (MR-WDCT), relating these criteria to those used by native speakers (NS) of the L2. The concern was to identify the extent to which NNSs' L1 pragmatic cultural schemata might influence their ratings. They found that the pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic factors, used by NNSs in evaluating pragmatic performance, were in part similar to and in part different from those used by NSs. Their findings, consistent with Prof. Zohreh R. Eslami's study, support the position that NNSs can benefit from instruction in how to avoid having the influence of L1 cultural schemata inadvertently bias their ratings.

The paper by **Azizullah Mirzaei** and **Reza Parhiskar** examines how Iranian EFL learners' identity (re)positioning in a university context may influence both pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic features in how they make L2 requests. The authors employed mixed-method data-collection procedures, including an identity questionnaire, classroom observations, role plays, stimulated recalls, and diaries. Their results indicated that the male learner was influenced by his L1 identity projections in his pragmatic choices even though he made efforts to assume an L2-oriented identity. In contrast, the initially L1-identity female learner progressively demonstrated more openness towards renegotiating a newer L2-inclined social identity and employing more L2-like sociopragmatic norms.

The focus of **Ali Derakhshan** and **Ali Malmir**'s paper is on the contribution of L2 learning aptitude as measured by Grigorenko et al.'s (2000) *Cognitive Ability for Novelty in Acquisition of*

*Language as Applied to Foreign Language Test (CANAL-FT)* to L2 speech-act knowledge. The study was prompted by a concern for exploring individual differences among learners in pragmatic performance among 121 Iranian upper-intermediate to advanced level EFL learners. A multiple regression analysis revealed that all five components of CANAL-FT were significant predictors of L2 speech-act knowledge. The aptitude for learning sentential inferences was the strongest predictor, followed by the ability to acquire the meanings of the whole passage. The authors found that the other three components of aptitude, namely, comprehending the meanings of contextualized neologisms, acquiring the language rules, and learning the meanings of paired associates, were moderate predictors of L2 speech act knowledge. These results appeared to underscore the benefits of obtaining aptitude data on learners as a means for better understanding the dynamics of L2 development in the area of pragmatics.

The study by **Amir Zand-Moghadam** and **Fatemeh Mohandes Samani** had two objectives. First, it aimed to investigate the effectiveness of task-based instruction on the development of pragmatic competence and second, it sought to see if different task types (i.e., information-gap, reasoning-gap, and opinion-gap) could have a significant effect on the development of EFL learners' pragmatic production, metapragmatic awareness, and comprehension of implicature. Their findings confirmed the positive effect of task-based instruction on EFL learner's pragmatic competence, consistent with Prof. Zohreh R. Eslami's studies on the teachability of pragmatic features. The results also revealed that learners in the information-gap task group outperformed the other groups on pragmatic production and metapragmatic awareness, but there was no significant difference among the groups regarding their performance on the implicature comprehension test.

**Marziyeh Yousefi** and **Hossein Nassaji**'s paper reviews the effect of corrective feedback (CF) on learning L2 pragmatics. The authors postulate that CF plays a pivotal role in the mastery of pragmatic knowledge. They suggest that materials designers view CF as an integral part of instruction, arguing that focused instructional tasks employing different types of CF contribute differentially to learners' L2 pragmatic development. They conclude that more research is necessary to obtain a better understanding of the relationship between CF and L2 pragmatic knowledge.

**Shaun Weihong Ko** and **Zohreh R. Eslami** provide a systematic review of the literature on the contributions that multiuser virtual environments (MUVes) have made to the development of pragmatic competence among second language (L2) learners. The article specifically illuminates the potential role that can be played by synthetic immersive virtual environments (SIEs) and massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs) in promoting learners' pragmatic awareness and production, and in enhancing interactional skills.

The next two papers by **Boudjemaa Dendenne** and **Azizeh Chalak** draw on Prof. Zohreh R. Eslami's contributions to research dealing with online and face-to-face compliments and praise (Derakhshan, Eslami, et al., 2020; Eslami et al., 2019; Eslami et al., 2020; Placencia & Eslami, 2020). Dendenne's study reports on an examination of the use of compliments, self-praise, and self-denigration, as exchanged among NNS English users from six countries (Algeria, Brazil, Indonesia, Japan, Taiwan, and the Netherlands) who took part in an online cross-cultural exchange project (Ibunka 2019). The author concluded that EFL teachers could benefit from taking a closer look at how speech acts could be used for discourse (metacomments, openers, closers) and relational purposes (to build rapport). In addition, the author suggests that teachers could benefit

from exploring the users' assumed identity while participating in EFL interactions (e.g., being apologetic about their linguistic performance)

Chalak's paper brings to the fore the ever-increasing effect of social networks such as Instagram as a platform for sharing information intended for self presentation. Her study uses a descriptive design to examine the perceptions and attitudes of Iranian EFL learners toward self-praise. The findings reported on the effect that self-praise, bragging, and humble bragging had on the audience. While self-praise was found to constitute a somewhat positive though weak self-presentation strategy, bragging and humblebragging were definitely perceived as ineffective strategies in that they created a negative impression. She argued that the findings could be used by the teachers and practitioners to raise awareness of English learners on how to employ language to observe netiquette and be appropriate and polite. It could also add to an understanding of the pragmatics of self-praise on social media, addressing issues regarding digital media literacy.

**Alyssa Kermad** examined how second language (L2) English learners dealt with cases where attention to prosody was necessary in correctly interpreting the speakers' intent. In her study, learners described their rationale for how they made their decisions about speaker intent in each of 16 speech act situations. She concluded that for almost half the speech acts, the learners relied primarily on the linguistic message and consequently did not arrive at the same judgments as did the NSs who drew on prosodic clues in their judgments. In over half the cases where the learners decisions were consistent with those of the NSs, the pragmatic force was transmitted just by the linguistic form, rather than by prosodic signals. She argues that there is a need for teachers to teach learners how to interpret a range of spoken cues, with a focus on prosodic properties, in order to correctly decipher pragmatic meaning across a variety of speech acts.

Drawing on the nature of the content, its positioning in the discourse, and the strategic role of utterances in turns and turn sequences, **Sara Gesuato** sought to identify and classify speech act moves more rigorously – consistent with how they actually appear in conversation. In her study, the offerers and the offerees produced conversation management moves for opening, closing, and sustaining the interaction (e.g., summoning vs responding to summons), and goal-furthering moves for negotiating the offering exchange in line with their complementary initiating vs responding discursive and speech-act roles (e.g., motivating the offer vs the reaction to it). She found that the strategies for making offers and for reacting to them were similar across interactional role-relationships. She found that clusters of moves tended to have preferred sequencing patterns, and that interlocutors tended to cooperate actively in the co-construction of their interaction. In addition, she found that function-detecting heuristic prompts were particularly useful for the identification of moves in turns. Gesuato recommended model scripts as a means for helping language learners become familiar with the interactional strategies called for in goal-oriented communication.

Finally, a state-of-the-art paper by **Zia Tajeddin** closes the thematic issue by pointing out the value of embracing a critical perspective when addressing issues of an applied nature in the teaching, learning, and assessing of interlanguage pragmatics. Informed by the postulations of critical applied linguistics, Tajeddin notes that whereas there have been numerous efforts to broaden the foci of critical applied linguistics, little or no effort has yet to be made to initiate a focus on critical applied pragmatics. In an effort to redress this gap, Tajeddin posits 10 principles underpinning the epistemic formation and functioning of *critical applied pragmatics*. Time will tell whether this thrust will result in the launching of a new direction for research and practice in L2 pragmatics.

As editors for this honorary volume, we would like to think that this collection of papers will, in fact, contribute to enriching future investigations dealing with the teaching, learning, and assessment of L2 pragmatics.

## Notes

[1] See the following for theoretical and practical underpinnings, based on empirical research: Alcón-Soler, 2015; Bardovi-Harlig et al., 2015; Cohen, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019; Cohen & Ishihara, 2013; Cohen & Shively, 2007; Cohen & Sykes, 2012; Derakhshan & Arabmofrad, 2018; Derakhshan & Eslami-Rasekh, 2015, 2020; Derakhshan & Shakki, 2020, 2021; Derakhshan et al., 2020; Eslami & Mirzaei, 2012; Eslami-Rasekh et al., 2004; Eslami-Rasekh et al., 2015; Félix-Brasdefer & Cohen, 2012; Fukuya & Martínez-Flor, 2008; Ishihara & Cohen, 2010, 2014; Kasper & Rose, 2002; Martínez-Flor & Fukuya, 2005; Plonsky & Zhuang, 2019; Rose, 2005; Shakki et al., 2020; Sonnenburg-Winkler et al., 2020; Taguchi, 2015, 2019; Taguchi & Roever, 2017; Takahashi, 2010; Tajeddin et al., 2012; Yousefi & Nassaji, 2019

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