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"Shall we talk? Everyone is talking"

L2 pragmatic challenges noticed by
Chinese study-abroad postgraduates
in the United Kingdom

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This study explores how study-abroad learners perceive and interpret gaps in their L2 pragmatic knowledge. While previous research focuses on pragmatic development in specific speech acts or pragmatic phenomena, this research adopts a learner-centered approach, emphasizing pragmatic challenges noticed by learners themselves during naturalistic interactions. Data were collected through learning journals and interviews with five Chinese students studying in the United Kingdom over one academic year. Results reveal that learners predominantly notice pragmatic gaps in three scenarios: (1) encountering unfamiliar sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic features, (2) experiencing difficulties in negotiating social or moral meanings, and (3) receiving implicit feedback from interlocutors regarding their pragmatic choices. Pragmatic awareness was particularly triggered in rapport-sensitive interactions with tutors and non-transactional conversations like small talk. While noticing sometimes led to metapragmatic reflection, learners often overgeneralized or misinterpreted sociopragmatic norms. The findings highlight the need for specialized pragmatics instruction in ESL/EFL contexts to support SA students.

Keywords: L2 pragmatics, noticing, study abroad, metapragmatic awareness

1. Introduction

Previous research has highlighted second language (L2) learners' pragmatics-related anxieties, even among those at advanced proficiency levels (e.g., Tajeddin & Moghadam, 2012). Unlike grammatical flaws, which may mainly indicate lower proficiency, pragmatic failure can lead to judgements about a person's moral

character, such as being perceived as impolite, arrogant, or insincere, hindering their achievement of social and interpersonal goals (McConachy, 2018). These challenges can be particularly pronounced in the study abroad (SA) context for students from countries where English is taught as a foreign language and is rarely used daily. This lack of real-world communicative experience leaves some learners unprepared for navigating the complexities of establishing connections and expressing themselves effectively in an L2. What is considered appropriate or acceptable in their previous communities may not align with the conventional norms in the SA context (Gu, 2016). Although research has emphasized the importance and effectiveness of pre-SA pragmatic instruction (Halenko & Jones, 2017; Matsumura, 2022; Wang & Spencer-Oatey, 2015), teaching pragmatics remains uncommon in many English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts. Similarly, language support for international students in higher education is generally academic-focused during SA. The frustrations of daily L2 communication remain overlooked, leaving most SA students to deal with any confusion using their own resources.

Many studies have shown that SA experiences facilitate the development of L2 pragmatic skills (e.g., Devlin, 2019; Sánchez-Hernández & Alcón-Soler, 2019; Schauer, 2009). One assumption is that daily interactions mediated through the L2 provide students with contextually appropriate L2 input (Jackson, 2019). This has been supported by empirical research suggesting a correlation between L2 pragmatic development and the intensity and diversity of learners' L2 exposure during SA (Sánchez-Hernández & Alcón-Soler, 2019; Tang et al., 2022). Additionally, in SA contexts, learners are often required to navigate new subject positions emerging in new social and cultural contexts and relationships, where their pragmatic behaviours can have real-life consequences or sometimes elicit situated feedback (Taguchi, 2015). These experiences can raise awareness of their lack of pragmatic knowledge, prompting them to notice, and sometimes reflect on, the meaning, function, and use of the L2 (Block, 2009).

While SA experiences are often seen as conducive to developing L2 pragmatic skills, researchers have noted that such development is not guaranteed. Taguchi (2012), for example, pointed out that pragmatic development entails the management of linguistic forms and social and cultural knowledge, which do not necessarily develop conjointly. Pérez-Vidal and Shively (2019) identified three key factors that may hinder significant improvement in L2 pragmatics: limited contact with other L2 speakers, insufficient exposure to specific pragmatic features, and a lack of explicit feedback from more proficient speakers. Moreover, certain pragmatic conventions, such as adjusting politeness levels or making indirect requests, are not always easily observable in everyday interactions without explicit instruction (Taguchi, 2012). As a result, even in SA environments that offer abundant L2

input, it can be both time-consuming and challenging for learners to notice, internalize, and adapt to the pragmatic norms of the L2 (Taguchi, 2012).

Existing research on L2 pragmatic development in the SA context often examines learners' improvement in specific speech acts or pragmatic phenomena by comparing their pre- and post-SA test results or contrasting their performance with peers who remain at home (Sánchez-Hernández, 2022). In these studies, simulated tasks are usually adopted to evaluate students' L2 pragmatics development, such as discourse completion tasks or DCTs (Félix-Brasdefer & Hasler-Barker, 2015; Li, 2014; Tang et al., 2022) and role plays (Devlin, 2019; Economidou-Kogetsidis & Halenko, 2022; Halenko et al., 2019; Nogami, 2020; Ren, 2019). In some cases, naturalistic data is collected; researchers typically focus on specific contexts. For example, Shively (2011) investigated requests made by SA learners of Spanish during counter service over the course of a semester, using conversation data collected through recordings.

However, it is important to note that researchers' interests may not always align with what learners themselves find significant during their sojourns, for example, situations where learners find it challenging to achieve social or transactional purposes, or situations prompting learners to reflect on how language choices affect interpersonal relationships. Limiting data collection to specific pragmatic features or contexts risks overlooking critical moments learners themselves notice, struggle with, or reflect upon. This study, therefore, takes a different approach to L2 pragmatic development in the SA context. It aims to expand the field by capturing instances of pragmatics-related communication gaps noticed by SA learners in naturalistic, L2-mediated interactions, with the awareness that understanding the pragmatic challenges encountered by learners in naturalistic settings is the prerequisite of designing and providing effective pedagogical support. This article presents and discusses findings from a larger longitudinal qualitative study.

Divided into six sections, including this introduction, the structure is as follows. Section 2 establishes the theoretical foundation for this study by reviewing pragmatics as a concept that connects culture, language, and identity. It also presents the noticing hypothesis as a key theoretical framework for the research, followed by a discussion of existing empirical studies on learners' noticing of L2 pragmatics. Section 3 outlines how the data were collected and analyzed. Sections 4 and 5 present the themes emerging from the data and discuss the key findings of this study, followed by its pedagogical implications in Section 6.

2.   Literature review

2.1   Pragmatics as the intersection of culture, language, and identity

Pragmatics primarily concerns how meaning is interpreted and constructed in communicative contexts, as well as how language is used to achieve social goals and manage interpersonal relationships (LoCastro, 2012; Spencer-Oatey, 2008). The relationship between linguistic and cultural knowledge is central to pragmatics (Taguchi & Roever, 2017). This is reflected in the widely recognized distinction between its two key components: pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics. Thomas (1983) positioned these terms at opposite ends of a continuum, ranging from "language-specific" to "culture-specific" (p. 101). Pragmalinguistics focuses on the linguistic resources used to convey pragmatic meaning, including illocutionary force and interpersonal intent (Thomas, 1983, p. 77). In contrast, sociopragmatics concerns the evaluation of sociocultural contexts in communication, such as shared social norms within a community (Marmaridou, 2011). Consequently, sociopragmatic judgements are shaped by cultural assumptions and prior experiences of social relationships (Kesebir & Haidt, 2010; McConachy, 2018; Spencer-Oatey & Kádár, 2016).

An individual's sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic interpretations and use are further mediated by their identity, including their perceptions of interpersonal contexts — such as social distance and power dynamics (Mesthrie & Bhatt, 2008; Niezgoda & Röver, 2001; Young, 2011) — and how they wish to present themselves in relationships (van Compernolle, 2014). Conversations are not merely exchanges of information but also sites where speakers continuously negotiate "fluid, context-dependent, and context-producing" identities (Norton & Toohey, 2011, p. 13), a dynamic that extends to L2 pragmatic choices. Studies show that learners evaluate not only whether a form is culturally conventional, but also whether it aligns with their sense of self and supports projecting a desired self-image in specific contexts (e.g., Hassall, 2014; Liu et al., 2022; Nogami, 2020). Therefore, defining "L2 pragmatic learning" requires considering the interplay of culture, language, and identity. It involves both interpreting the significance of particular speech forms in sociocultural contexts (McConachy, 2018) and enhancing learners' ability to select appropriate forms for specific situations, enabling them to flexibly present themselves in desired ways in an L2 (Diao & Maa, 2019).

2.2 Noticing in L2 pragmatic development

The term *noticing* was first proposed by Schmidt (1990) to refer to focal and episodic awareness in L2 learning and acquisition, as a level of learning beyond "perception" — the passive detection of linguistic input without conscious awareness, and as the prerequisite for "understanding" — further analysis of forms and functions as well as their generalization across instances (pp. 132–133). Counter to Krashen's (1981) input hypothesis, which suggests that language acquisition is largely a subconscious process occurring through exposure to comprehensible L2 input, Schmidt (1995) and Robinson (1995) emphasized that a certain level of consciousness is necessary for knowledge to be transformed from short-term to long-term memory, and therefore essential for language learning.

Following the noticing hypothesis, Kasper and Rose (2001) state that acquiring L2 pragmatics requires a certain level of conscious attention to the relationships between forms, meanings, and contexts. However, L2 pragmatic conventions in the SA context often function as implicit norms and rarely articulated explicitly (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001). Due to the discomfort of addressing inappropriate language use and the tolerance of ambiguity, particularly in English as a lingua franca contexts (Cohen, 2012; Seidlhofer, 2011), L2 learners may receive limited feedback on their pragmatic choices, making these features less noticeable in everyday interactions (Taguchi, 2012). It is therefore assumed that noticing of L2 pragmatics likely occurs to learners when new pragmatic features "challenge their current assumptions, spark interest, raise questions, or provide points of connection" (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 60).

While debates persist about the possibility of implicit learning without awareness (Szcześniak, 2024), it is widely agreed that noticing is crucial for bridging learners' interlanguage and the target language. Noticing is also seen as the trigger for explicit learning analysis, known in pragmatics as *metapragmatic awareness*, where learners engage analytically with language use and its connections to interpersonal relationships and cultural values through form-meaning-context mapping (McConachy, 2018). Applying Liddicoat and Scarino's (2013) model (Figure 1) of intercultural learning practices, McConachy (2018) further deconstructed metapragmatic awareness into four stages, including noticing, comparison, reflection, and interaction. The process begins when learners notice new L2 pragmatic features. The attention aroused, then, might trigger learners to compare knowledge accumulated in previous experience and the new features, provoke more complex and complicated reflections, and further "communicate those meanings" and "explore those meanings" in interactions (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 61).
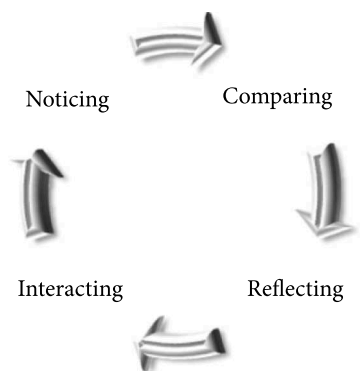
Figure 1. Interacting processes of intercultural learning
(Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 60)

Despite recognizing noticing as a crucial cognitive and metacognitive trigger for L2 pragmatic development (McConachy, 2018; Schmidt, 2010), noticing has rarely been centered in empirical research in this field (Gesuato, 2022). As mentioned in the introduction, linguists in this field have tended to focus on learners' improvement in one specific speech act or pragmatic phenomenon within a chosen context (e.g., counter service, emails). These studies have primarily focused on productive skills, with less attention to pragmatic awareness and recognition (Sánchez-Hernández, 2022). Moreover, widely used methods such as DCTs and role plays have been criticized for failing to capture learners' authentic responses and language choices (Brown, 2013; Golato, 2003) and for oversimplifying fluid and complex real-life contexts and relationships (McConachy, 2019). The limited scope of data collection also risks constraining researchers to predetermined agendas while overlooking critical moments related to L2 pragmatics that learners themselves find important, and that cause confusion or difficulties for learners. By contrast, educational researchers have primarily investigated L2 pragmatics noticing in pedagogical settings. Some researchers have cited Schmidt's (1990) noticing hypothesis to explain the effectiveness of explicit pragmatic instructions (Bardovi-Harlig & Vellenga, 2012; Halenko & Jones, 2011, 2017), while other studies have explored how pedagogical intervention fosters noticing of pragmatic features (Nguyen, 2013; Sachtleben & Denny, 2012; Takahashi, 2005).

Yates and Major (2015) paid closer attention to noticing of L2 pragmatics in naturalistic settings in a qualitative longitudinal study. It was, however, in a different context. They traced the settlement processes of immigrants to Australia who arrived with only rudimentary English skills — a cohort largely differing from SA students in both their language proficiency and daily communication contexts. In interviews, their participants reported significant difficulties in small-talk knowledge and skills, such as participating in chat, interpreting and using informal and

indirect language, and understanding and responding to humor. As highlighted by Yates and Major (2015), understanding the pragmatic demands encountered by target learners in their everyday-life environment constitutes a foundational step in designing effective pedagogical support. To bridge this research gap, this article presents and analyzes data drawn from a larger qualitative longitudinal study, focusing on learners' noticing of L2 pragmatic challenges in a naturalistic SA context, and examining how such noticing may trigger further metapragmatic comparison and reflection.

3. Methodology

This study draws inspiration from "critical incident technique" or "critical moment analysis," a research method that encourages participants to "[identify] important events that represented critical shifts, or schema-refreshments, either positive or negative, in this experience" (Wei, 2011, p. 1224). Participants' narratives of critical incidents provide researchers with access to experiences that are not directly observable (Spencer-Oatey & Harsch, 2015), allowing researchers to trace participants' learning as it unfolds across time and diverse real-life contexts (Barkhuizen, 2014). The method has a clear focus on each individual's learning trajectory; then patterns can emerge by analyzing the regularity of such moments (Wei, 2010). While these narratives may not offer objective or complete accounts of events, they provide valuable insight into what participants notice and how they perceive their experiences from an insider's perspective (Spencer-Oatey & Harsch, 2015; Webster & Mertova, 2007).

With qualitative, autobiographical data generated through interviews and online learning journals over one academic year (July-October 2019 to September 2020) from five SA students, the study attempted to capture moments when SA learners notice gaps in their L2 pragmatic knowledge. The research question is as follows: In what moments do students notice gaps in their L2 pragmatic knowledge in the UK study-abroad environment, and how do they make sense of these instances?

3.1 Five participants

Participants in this study were five students enrolled in a one-year postgraduate program in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages), recruited on a voluntary basis through a presentation introducing this research during the induction week. The group consisted of one male and four female students, aged between 22 and 32. All of them were from mainland China, and none had previously resided abroad. Mandarin was their first language, and they had all been

learning English for over a decade in educational settings, achieving an advanced C1 level (IELTS 6.5–7.5). Four participants majored in subjects related to the English language during their undergraduate study (e.g., English literature, English linguistics, and English education), and two had worked as English teachers. Despite these factors, four of them noted a scarcity of opportunities to communicate in English both in classrooms and daily life within their home country. All of them provided written informed consent, and pseudonyms (selected by the participants themselves, shown in Table 1 below) were employed to safeguard their identities along with any other potentially revealing information.

3.2   Data collection via learning journals and interviews

Learning journals served as the primary method of data collection during one academic year (October 2019 to September 2020), aiming to capture noticing of L2 in a broad range of naturalistic interactions that cannot be directly observed. As a replacement of traditional journals, a more convenient and interactive alternative was introduced: sending voice or text messages to the researcher via WeChat, a widely used social media app among mainland Chinese participants. One key consideration for using online chat was its immediacy; unlike traditional journals, it allowed participants to flexibly record experiences and thoughts via their mobile devices. This immediacy was crucial for capturing learners' noticing of L2 pragmatics, as delayed reporting could result in memory loss or less detailed descriptions. Moreover, the informal style of online chats was deliberately chosen to accommodate varying text lengths and reduce pressure on participants to refine their language or produce lengthy, structured responses.

At the start of data collection, each participant received instructions in a 30-minute, one-on-one, face-to-face meeting. The researcher introduced the terms pragmatics, sociopragmatics, and pragmalinguistics in layperson's terms with examples, then encouraged participants to document daily encounters and conversations related to L2 pragmatics that captured their attention, such as those they found interesting, stimulating, confusing, or awkward. Participants were asked to describe the situation or conversation and reflect on their actions, feelings, or thoughts. Recognizing that the definition of pragmatics might seem vague, the researcher provided training slides with definitions and examples for reference (see Appendix A). Participants were encouraged to clarify definitions or share uncertain examples with the researcher, who helped judge their relevance. During data collection, participants occasionally sent WeChat messages to the researcher, beginning with "I'm not sure whether this is considered pragmatics" or ending with "Is this pragmatics?" In such cases, the researcher would clarify the definition and explain it using the example reported by the participants. Some

journal entries included non-pragmatic incidents, most of which related to cultural differences and the appropriateness of behaviors (e.g., whether to provide slippers for guests or hold doors open for others).

Recognizing that maintaining learning journals over an extended period can be demanding, the researcher adopted a flexible approach, imposing no strict requirements regarding minimum word count, frequency of entries, or mandatory questions. With participants' permission, the researcher would send a reminder if they went silent for an extended period (e.g., two to three weeks). Participants were encouraged to use whichever language — English or Chinese — they felt most comfortable with; Chinese was subsequently used in all interviews and most journal entries. This flexible approach was intended to make the sharing process enjoyable rather than burdensome, acknowledging that coercing participants into providing data could be ethically inappropriate and potentially compromise data quality. At times, the researcher posed inquiries drawing from anecdotes relayed by the participants, to gather more contextual information or clarify the information provided by the participants, which sometimes triggered further conversations. An example is presented below:

Hanguang: I had breakfast in Oxford today. The woman working there called me "lovely." I felt quite happy about how she addressed me.

R: Was it "lovely," or "love"?

Hanguang: "Lovely" was what I heard.

R: Why would you feel being called "lovely" is pleasant?

Hanguang: It's complicated. I feel I'm accepted by this culture, and I feel a shorter distance between me and the locals. I think it also has something to do with gender. My grandma raised me when I was young, and most close relatives I had in my family were female. I feel being called "lovely" is like being treated as her younger brother or nephew. I don't think I'd have this positive feeling if it were a man.   (Learning Journal: February 2020)

Data collected via WeChat were transcribed timely, stored, and encrypted in OneDrive, and deleted from WeChat on the mobile devices used. Ten percent of the original and translated data were randomly selected and checked by two people with high proficiency in both languages. Table 1 follows, presenting the amount of data collected from each participant. Each social event shared by participants is counted as a noticing episode to roughly indicate the frequency of noticing. Appendix B provides three examples from the original learning journals.

Each participant was invited to four to five semi-structured interviews, evenly distributed over the 12-month period, lasting between 30 and 90 minutes. The first interview gathered background information relevant to the research context,

Table 1. Qualitative data from online chat and interviews

Participants	Interviews	Learning Journals (Online Chat)
Chloe	4 times, 191 mins in total	47 noticing episodes, about 12,400 words
Tina	5 times, 174 mins in total	43 noticing episodes, about 37,000 words
Win	5 times, 232 mins in total	15 noticing episodes, about 2,700 words
Hanguang	5 times, 228 mins in total	21 noticing episodes, about 3,300 words
Mary	5 times, 168 mins in total	13 noticing episodes, about 2,400 words

while subsequent interviews served two key purposes: complementing the learning journals by collecting additional pragmatics-related learning incidents and further exploring experiences recorded in the journals. To address the first aim, participants were asked at the start of each interview, "Are there any new stories you would like to share that you haven't mentioned on WeChat?" This prompt proved effective, as participants did not always prioritize documenting their experiences in real time but were often willing to share them during conversations. The data collected this way were also recorded as noticing episodes in the previous table. For the second aim, the researcher reviewed previous journal entries before each interview and developed personalized questions, typically asking participants to clarify or elaborate on the context in which noticing occurred, or their understanding and reflections on the situations.

3.3   Paradigmatic analysis

This study adopts paradigmatic analysis to configure the stories shared by participants into themes and categories, aiming to identify patterns. Data analysis follows an inductive approach, the core of which is to identify themes and theories from data rather than using data to test pre-established hypotheses, allowing the researcher to interpret phenomena from participants' perspectives (Charmaz, 2006). Through studying and comparing data, the researcher immersed herself to the fullest extent in the contexts in which participants are situated in order to expand her understanding of the researched topic (Chen, 2000).

The analysis began with close, repeated readings of interview and journal data, allowing the researcher to engage deeply with each individual case before making systematic comparisons. This initial stage facilitated the identification of patterns and connections within each participant's experiences, offering insight into the contexts in which pragmatics-related noticing occurs. Following this in-depth examination, the researcher drafted biographical chapters for each participant, integrating excerpts from journals and interviews with her interpretation

and analysis. These chapters, completed shortly after data collection, were shared with participants for member checking — a process of seeking participant validation to mitigate researcher bias (Charmaz, 2006, p. 111). The guiding questions used for member checking are included in Appendix C. All participants confirmed the overall accuracy of the descriptions and interpretations, reinforcing the study's trustworthiness. Two participants added a few incidents, as responses to the question: "Do these themes and stories remind you of other relevant experiences you would like to add?"

Once thoroughly familiar with each participant's narrative, the researcher identified preliminary patterns and categories in response to the research question. She then re-examined the data to assess whether they supported, complemented, or contradicted these categories, refining the framework accordingly. This iterative process involved restructuring existing categories, merging overlapping ones, removing those with limited evidence, and incorporating new insights. The re-reading stage was repeated until no further modifications were necessary. The final themes identified in this study are presented in the following section. When multiple data points aligned with a single theme, the researcher applied Holliday's (2016) criteria for data selection, prioritizing those that added contextual variety or conveyed the most information concisely.

4.   Findings: Noticing of pragmatics in L2 input, output, and interactions

Categorizing the data proved challenging due to the highly individualized nature of noticing. The five participants had significantly different social experiences throughout the year. In many cases, participants provided rich contextual information, where sociocultural backgrounds and linguistic features were deeply intertwined, making it difficult to isolate and categorize specific patterns. The participants' noticing of L2 pragmatics also appeared to be shaped by their backgrounds and personalities. For instance, from the first interview, Hanguang was perceived as highly polite — perhaps even excessively so. He frequently used hedging language and insisted on addressing the researcher with 您 (the polite form of you) instead of 你 (the informal form), despite the researcher, of a similar age, suggesting the latter. Hanguang explained that this formality was instilled in him by his family, and in his journals and interviews, he consistently noticed pragmatic features related to formality and politeness more frequently than other participants.

The data suggest that noticing in L2 pragmatics is largely driven by cultural and identity-related factors. More specifically, learners tend to become aware of pragmatic gaps when L2 features challenge their existing assumptions rooted in

their previous cultural backgrounds, hinder their ability to express their desired identity, or affect their capacity to establish and maintain relationships. Analysis of the data reveals recurring patterns in moments when participants noticed gaps in their pragmatic knowledge during L2 interactions, as demonstrated in Sections 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3. These include: (1) encountering unfamiliar sociopragmatic or pragmalinguistic features in others' language use, (2) struggling to negotiate social or moral meanings while expressing themselves, and (3) receiving implicit feedback from interlocutors (e.g., unexpected reactions or communication breakdowns) that indicate potential issues with language appropriateness. Additionally, two specific scenarios emerged frequently: communication with academic tutors and initiating small talk, both of which presented notable pragmatic challenges for participants.

Data excerpts from these noticing episodes also illustrate how learners attempt to make sense of these gaps and, in some cases, make deliberate efforts to address them (e.g., by imitating proficient speakers or seeking advice). However, due to their limited L2 exposure, learners frequently overgeneralize or develop incorrect sociopragmatic assumptions, leading to unconventional pragmatic choices. Without corrective feedback or exposure to relevant language input that stimulates noticing and reflection, some misinterpretations persisted for an extended period.

Additionally, although many noticing episodes trigger only surface-level sense-making, learners sometimes move beyond superficial linguistic and behavioral disparities to reflect on the sociocultural meanings underlying these differences, as discussed in Section 4.4.

4.1   "Cheers" means "Thank you"?: Unfamiliar pragmatic features in L2 input

The data indicate that participants tended to notice gaps in their pragmatic knowledge when encountering unfamiliar or unexpected pragmatic usage. This was particularly evident with unfamiliar pragmalinguistic forms used by other speakers, especially those frequently occurring in daily interactions. For instance:

Mary: I just noticed "Cheers" can be used to show appreciation. Perhaps this is an expression popular among young people?   (Interview: April 2020)

Hanguang: British say "Cheers" a lot rather than "Thank you." I feel I'm not used to it […].[1] It's too casual and informal.   (Interview: September 2019)

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1. For a more concise presentation, relatively lengthy or less relevant information has been omitted.

Both Hanguang and Mary recognized "Cheers" as an informal expression of gratitude. While Hanguang identified its "casual and informal" nature, Mary mistakenly assumed it was primarily used by young people — likely an overgeneralization resulting from limited interaction with individuals of different ages in the L2 community.

Noticing also occurred when sociopragmatic features in the L2 input deviated from the participants' previous cultural expectations. As Cohen (2012) noted, L2 users may approach interactions with preconceived expectations, only to discover that pragmatic norms in the target language community differ significantly. Numerous examples emerged from participants' narratives, including:

Mary: When we were hiking, our team leader [British] kept greeting passers-by. I was confused. We don't know them. Why should we greet them? [...] I then tried to greet people, and it felt really good. When you say "Hi" first, the locals will give you big smiles and greet you too.   (Interview: November 2019)

Chloe: Before the LGBT parade, I bought a bracelet from a street vendor. She was very welcoming and nice. She said: "Morning honey, have a nice parade." But Chinese peddlers seldom, or even never, do such a thing. They will just tell you how much the goods are.   (Learning Journal: August 2019)

Hanguang: I just went to a burger place, and the shop assistant called me "Honey." I felt so weird. I didn't say anything to him, but I felt my brain was full of question marks.   (Learning Journal: December 2019)

4.2 Is "I hope you are doing well" too casual?: Social and moral considerations in L2 output

The connection between noticing and language production has been explained in the output hypothesis, a classic psycholinguistic theory in SLA; in L2 output, the need to communicate encourages learners to notice gaps between what they hope to express and what they are able to express (Swain, 1985). This process raises awareness of linguistic inadequacies and may stimulate the learning of corresponding L2 forms or the adoption of alternative communicative strategies to achieve their communicative goals (Swain, 1985). The findings of this study support the Output Hypothesis; however, in the context of L2 pragmatics, noticing appears to be driven more by social and moral considerations — specifically, a gap between their desire to express identity or maintain relationships and the pragmatic knowledge required. Participants' narratives provide rich evidence for the social and moral basis of noticing in L2 output. For example, Mary described her struggles in responding to commonly used phrases:

Mary: I don't know how to respond to "Thank you." I used to respond with "You're welcome" or "It's my pleasure," as it is taught in textbooks. For example, once I blocked someone, and I stepped back. He said, "Thank you," and I said, "It's OK," but I felt a bit weird. Cashiers in shops also say "Thank you" after I pay. I don't know how to reply either. (Interview: December 2019)

In this case, Mary is likely to have perceived the favor as mutual, making a simple acceptance of thanks feel inappropriate. Alternatively, her uncertainty could stem from not hearing "You're welcome" frequently used by others during her SA. Rather than merely reflecting a lack of knowledge about linguistic conventions, Mary's noticing was likely driven by a deeper concern with presenting a desired self-image — balancing politeness with informality in daily interactions.

Another example of noticing driven by social and moral consideration is from Win (female) regarding using salutations in email writing:

Win: I started with "Dear Gavin" [a male lecturer], and I felt it was a bit strange. I then asked my language exchange partner how I should start an email to a male teacher, and she said she would put "Sir Gavin." Since then, I started using "Sir" as the salutation to male teachers […] Although Gavin wrote "Dear Win" to me, I still felt it was weird, because the translation of "Dear" in Chinese is '亲爱的' [a title to show affection]. My language partner told me it was indeed weird; so, she usually uses "Sir." I'm not sure, but I followed her advice because she is a native speaker. (Learning Journal: November 2019)

In Win's perception, the use of the Mandarin "亲爱的" ('Dear') with members of the opposite sex usually suggests an intimate relationship, and even though Win noticed the male lecturer, also a native English speaker, started his email with "Dear Win," she felt using the same expression placed her in an uncomfortable position within the teacher-student dynamic. "Sir Gavin" is not a conventional salutation in the UK higher education context. Although it is possibly just a peculiar linguistic habit of that friend, Win adopted it as a well-accepted usage without much doubt because of her friend's native speaker identity.

Tina, too, frequently experienced ambiguities and confusion in her academic life concerning communication with tutors. The following two excerpts are from one journal entry, where Tina shared an email she sent to tutors and where noticing was triggered by her concerns about polite and appropriate language use. She wrote down "I am Tina from TESOL" as the first sentence:

Tina: I introduced myself at the very beginning. I thought about starting with "I hope you are doing well," but I feel it's too casual for lecturers, so I decided not to use this sentence and go to my point directly.

(Original Text from Tina's Email/ Learning Journal: November 2019)

When proposing requests, she put some of her words in brackets:

> I hope sincerely to learn your advice concerning my ideas about the essay, thus I could structure the essay as soon as I can. (If it wouldn't disturb you, I would book an appointment with you at your available time to further specify my ideas about the essay).   (Original Text from Tina's Email: November 2019)

Tina: I made two requests in the email: I sought advice about my essay structure, and I hoped to book a meeting. I think the first one was not a big ask; so, I expressed it directly. As for the meeting, I think that was also a reasonable requirement, but I don't know how I could have expressed it more gently. I wanted to say I wanted to meet with the lecturer, but I didn't want to disturb him.

(Learning Journal: November 2019)

While writing emails, Tina was evaluating the social distance, power gap, and degree of imposition involved in her requests. From her retrospective journals, it seems she made fair estimations about these factors and the general situation but struggled to find appropriate pragmalinguistic expressions to fulfil her communicative intention. Despite her cautious efforts to be polite, Tina made inaccurate assumptions about certain expressions, as illustrated by the examples above. Some of her misjudgments seem to be intuitive, with no clear reasons apparent from our conversations. For example, her assessment of the formality of "I hope you are doing well" and showing indirectness by putting her request in brackets "If I wouldn't disturb you…," do not appear clearly influenced by either first language (L1) or L2 knowledge from natural input.

4.3   "Look, he thought you are a king!": Feedback in L2-mediated interactions

Explicit corrective feedback on L2 pragmatic use from more competent speakers was rarely mentioned by the five participants during the year. Only Tina reported being corrected twice on her pragmatic choices by a close friend who was a long-time resident of Europe and a more proficient English speaker. One example involved her interactions with her friend's Polish mother-in-law:

Tina: I didn't know how to address her when I first arrived. I asked my friend, and she told me I could call her "Helen." However, I felt Polish people are relatively conservative, and it would be too blunt if I just called her "Helen." My friend calls her "Mom." So, I also called her "Mom." I didn't mean that she was actually my mom. For me, it's like we in China call older people "Aunt" to show politeness and respect, but my friend told me I couldn't call Helen "Mom"; so, I started to

use her name again. I felt more comfortable and not that embarrassed after two days calling her "Helen."   (Learning Journal: January 2020)

In her reflection, Tina explained her decision-making process. Her initial choice of address, later deemed inappropriate, stemmed from a blend of cultural and language influences. She used "Mom" to show respect to a person who was her senior, believing it to be appropriate in Polish society, while also drawing from pragmalinguistic conventions in her L1 that serve similar purposes in comparable contexts. Essentially, her language choice was shaped by both her L1 pragmalinguistic norms and her broader understanding (or stereotypes) of Polish sociopragmatic culture. The corrective feedback she received heightened her awareness of the unconventional nature of her pragmatic choices, enabling her to adjust them immediately.

Conversely, the participants often became aware of L2 pragmatic norms through implicit feedback from communication breakdowns. When they failed to achieve their communicative goals or received unexpected responses, they tended to re-evaluate the appropriateness of their L2 choices. One example is Hanguang's consideration of the formality of "How can I address you?" in a conversation with British friends:

Hanguang: Once I asked a man "How should I address you?" That man was surprised, and other people around were also very surprised. A person next to him said, "Look, he thought you are a king!"

Researcher: How did you react?

Hanguang: I was thinking, "Am I wrong?"

Researcher: Did you ask them about it?

Hanguang: No, I didn't. I got it from their reaction. I realized the sentence should be used with people in a higher social position, like some kind of political position. It's better not to use this question with a friend, but I still don't know how I should say it.   (Interview: October 2019)

Hanguang picked up implicit feedback from the interlocutors' reactions, which led him to recognize that his pragmalinguistic choice was too formal for casual conversation. Six weeks later, I revisited this topic in another interview, and by then, he had adapted his language by observing and imitating British native speakers during a Sunday church service:

Researcher: Do you remember the story you shared about you asking "How should I address you?" How do you ask people about their names now?

Hanguang: "What's your name?" Actually, usually, others ask me first, and I'll ask back: "What's yours?" [...] I noticed other people simply use "What's your name?"   (Interview: November 2019)

Another example comes from Win's attempt at small talk with a stranger before a volunteer training workshop:

Win: Before the workshop, everyone in the room was chatting... I asked the Belgian guy next to me, "Shall we talk? Everyone is talking. I feel a bit awkward." He said he didn't mind remaining silent. He didn't feel awkward. His response made me even more awkward.

Researcher: Did you chat with him because everyone was chatting, and you felt you were obliged to chat? Or did you want to talk with him?

Win: Yes, it was just because everyone was talking. I didn't know why they were talking. I would feel more comfortable just sitting there silently. I think I started the conversation with an awkward question.

Researcher: You would prefer to sit there and remain silent. Is that because in your previous experience, Chinese people don't usually talk in this kind of situation?

Win: Yes. I didn't know what to do when all of the people, who were total strangers to each other, just started talking.   (Interview: December 2019)

In this interaction, Win recognized that her attempt to imitate the conversational behavior of others had resulted in a breakdown. This suggests she lacked pragmatic knowledge about initiating casual conversations with strangers. It appears that Win was unclear about both the sociopragmatic purpose of small talk and the appropriate pragmalinguistic resources for this context. As she pointed out, small talk between strangers rarely occurred in similar settings in her L1 community. Consequently, she had little prior exposure to this spoken genre and limited sociopragmatic reference points.

The final example comes from Mary's observation of her friend's interaction with a vendor:

Mary: My friend learned the expression "Could I have this one?" from English native speakers. She used this sentence when we bought lunch in a market, and the seller said, "Of course, you can, but only if you pay for it." I don't know if he was trying to be humorous, or if this sentence is usually used between people from different social classes.   (Learning Journal: February 2020)

Although it is unclear whether the vendor was intentionally hinting at inappropriate language formality, his unexpected response prompted Mary to reflect on the formality of her friend's language choice. However, she did not appear to reach a conclusion or seek clarification after the interaction. The ambiguity of the vendor's intent may have made it difficult for Mary to determine an appropriate reply, potentially discouraging her from continuing the conversation.

4.4   Metapragmatic comparison and reflection triggered by noticing

As observed in the data clips above, noticing L2 pragmatics usually triggers a certain level of sense-making. Examples include hypotheses about the formality of the pragmatic phenomenon, brief comparisons between L1 and L2, or awareness of one's own feelings during the conversation. In some cases, noticing triggers deeper analysis, aligning with Stage 3 of the metapragmatic awareness cycle outlined by McConachy (2018), where learners attempt to decode the sociocultural meaning behind the pragmatic feature or reflect on their ways of negotiating interpersonal relationships and identities. Tina's reflection on the Christmas Eve that she spent with her Chinese friend and the friend's Polish family provided another example:

Tina: They are more direct when they express their feelings. Before dinner, each of us had a pancake on the table, and we walked around, took pieces from each other's pancakes, kissed and hugged each other and said Christmas blessings. I feel this is impossible in a traditional Chinese family. We tend to express ourselves more implicitly. I think it has something to do with our traditional arts. We like the beauty of being implicit and hazy. In garden design, for example, we like those kinds of designs where people are surprised by nice views when looking through a door, rather than letting everything be exposed explicitly. For them [Polish], it seems more important to be direct about expressing their feelings.

(Learning Journal: January 2020)

Observing the Christmas routine, Tina noticed that the Polish family expressed affection to each other rather explicitly. She then went beyond the surface of linguistic and behavioral disparities to reflect on the sociocultural meanings that lay behind the differences. She creatively explained the implicit way of expressing affection, which she commonly experienced in her L1 society, illustrating consistency between styles of self-expression and aesthetic preferences in Chinese culture. She also recognized the positive impact of expressing affection directly, as experienced with the Polish family. This nudged her to reflect on family relationships and how she would like to negotiate her identity in such relationships:

Tina: I prefer their way to express love. The Chinese family doesn't always express love explicitly, but it does not mean we don't love each other. I believe the caring and goodwill people have for their families are the same in both countries. If we have these feelings, why don't we simply tell our loved ones? I feel sometimes we are too implicit, and it causes unnecessary misunderstandings between families and partners. It's like: I love you, but I fail to let you feel it.

(Learning Journal: January 2020)

5.   Discussion

Research on L2 pragmatics noticing remains limited, with most studies focusing on pedagogical pragmatics, while learners' noticing in daily contexts is underexplored. This study addressed this gap by capturing instances of pragmatics-related communication gaps noticed by SA learners in naturalistic interactions. While the article presents only a limited selection of data snippets from the extensive collection, these instances have effectively represented the experiences reported by the five participants over the academic year. To summarize, learners tended to notice pragmatic gaps in three key situations: (1) encountering unfamiliar sociopragmatic or pragmalinguistic features in L2 input, (2) struggling to negotiate social or moral meanings in L2 output, and (3) receiving implicit feedback on language appropriateness through unexpected reactions or communication breakdowns.

The findings align with existing literature (e.g., Tajeddin & Moghadam, 2012), highlighting that even high-proficiency SA learners struggle with L2 pragmatics. A notable contribution of this study lies in identifying two specific scenarios in which participants frequently experienced pragmatic challenges, despite the highly diverse experiences they shared. One such challenge is initiating and maintaining small talk. Small talk requires advanced conversational and sociocultural skills such as initiating and maintaining conversations, selecting appropriate topics, and interpreting informal language and humor. Similar findings were reported in Spencer-Oatey's (2018) study on SA students' difficulties with greetings, where participants struggled even with basic exchanges such as "How are you?" and "Are you alright?" (p.307). Some Chinese students attributed this difficulty to linguistic patterns commonly used or taught in their home country. Struggles with small talk appeared to hinder SA learners from sustaining conversations, forming interpersonal connections, and confidently engaging in L2-mediated social activities.

Additionally, all five participants reported L2 pragmatics-related concerns in email writing and face-to-face communication with tutors, covering a range of pragmatic features such as use of terms of address and language formality. Their cautious pragmatic choices may stem from the dual transactional and interactional nature of student-tutor interactions: while seeking academic support, students must also maintain hierarchical relationships through status-congruent language (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2015). This discretion also reflects negotiations between home and host cultural and linguistic conventions (Wang & Halenko, 2022b). In Chinese culture, students are expected to show deference and compliance in hierarchical teacher-student relationships (Zhou et al., 2012). Previous research has observed similar struggles and sought to explore students' perspectives (Ai, 2017; Jin & Cortazzi, 2017; Wu, 2015; Zhu & O'Sullivan, 2020).

Investigating Chinese learners' classroom participation in UK universities, Zhu and O'Sullivan (2020), Jin and Cortazzi (2017), and Wu (2015) identified pragmatic gaps as one of the reasons contributing to learners' silence. Examples include feeling unsure whether asking questions is considered an interruption during the class and whether publicly challenging the teacher is deemed appropriate. Similar findings are shared in Ai's (2017) research focusing on Chinese students in Australian universities; influenced by the hierarchical teacher-student relationship in mainland China, some students were afraid to communicate with their teachers when they needed support.

As suggested by Schmidt (1990) and McConachy (2018), noticing does not always trigger metacognitive analysis but, at times, prompts comparison, generalization, or deeper reflection. Based on the data in this article, sense-making can be understood as involving a spectrum of metacognitive processes. At one end, participants may engage in surface-level activities, such as comparing L1 and L2 forms with limited engagement with sociocultural contexts (e.g., "Chinese peddlers seldom, or even never, do such a thing"), forming assumptions about unfamiliar usages without rationalization or further verification (e.g., "Perhaps this is an expression popular among young people?"), or identifying intuitive feelings when encountering new pragmatic usages (e.g., "The shop assistant called me 'Honey.' I felt so weird... I felt my brain was full of question marks."). At the other end, more sophisticated sense-making involves decoding the sociocultural meaning behind pragmatic features or reflecting on how these features shape interpersonal relationships and identities (e.g., Tina's reflection on the explicitness of expressing love). In this process, learners construct intercultural awareness in L2 pragmatics by decentering themselves from their familiar structures and "understand[ing] multiple perspectives and searching for and accepting multiple possible interpretations" (Liddicoat, 2014, p. 261).

Beyond metapragmatic sense-making, participants also made deliberate efforts to address pragmatic gaps by seeking help from competent L2 speakers and imitating their pragmatic actions. However, the findings show that participants rather frequently arrived at overgeneralization or sociopragmatic misassumptions, resulting in unconventional L2 pragmatic choices. In addition to previously identified factors such as L1 influence (Halenko & Winder, 2022) and L1 idiosyncratic conversational styles (Li & Gao, 2017), the misassumptions may stem from students' synthesis of linguistic and cultural repertoires across their L1 and L2.

Implicit feedback, often received through communication breakdowns or unexpected responses, can prompt learners to re-evaluate their pragmatic choices. While implicit feedback does not always lead to immediate resolution, it still effectively raises learners' awareness of gaps in their sociopragmatic or pragmalinguistic knowledge, encouraging them to refine their understanding through further

observation and social interaction. As seen in the cases of Hanguang, Win, and Mary, learners often required additional exposure, reinforcement, or contextual clarification before adapting their pragmatic use accordingly.

Corrective feedback, which would have allowed learners to make immediate pragmatic adjustments, was rarely reported. One reason for this lack of feedback, as noted in the literature review, is the discomfort in addressing inappropriate language use and the tolerance of ambiguity, particularly in the English as a lingua franca (ELF) context (Cohen, 2012; Seidlhofer, 2011). Unconventional pragmatic choices may go unchallenged, especially if they do not interfere with transactional communication. Another contributing factor is the lack of pragmatics-related support in the classroom environment, where students are more likely to receive corrective feedback from tutors on their unconventional pragmatic usage. In this study, even participants who attended pre-sessional courses reported a lack of support in L2 pragmatics, despite experiencing frustration and confusion in both academic and social settings. As a result, some misassumptions and misinterpretations could remain fossilized for an extended period — potentially until the end of the SA experience — without further relevant input to stimulate noticing and adjustment.

The following methodological limitations may affect the generalizability of the findings. First, as a necessary trade-off for research duration and data volume (Creswell & Poth, 2018), the sample size of this study is small and focuses on a specific group of learners. Second, the significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic reduced participan social interactions after the first five months, and this should be considered when transferring findings to other contexts. It is likely that noticing and sense-making of L2 pragmatics would have occurred more frequently in the absence of the pandemic. The process of generalization therefore requires readers to take these contextual factors into account, and view the findings reflexively and critically when considering the transferability of the cases in this study to their own contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Another point to consider is potential intervention led by the researcher as well as the research. Remaining part of the research itself was likely to influence their SA life because journal keeping, interview discussions, and the researcher's continuing involvement might have unavoidably fostered noticing and sense-making of L2 pragmatics. However, like many qualitative studies, the aim of this research is not to uncover universal laws but to explore the reality constructed by individuals from an emic perspective. In this process, the presence of the researcher is unavoidable and should be viewed as a resource that encourages knowledge co-construction and disclosure (Holliday, 2016; Lamb, 2016). A responsive and empathetic researcher is especially important in longitudinal studies that require significant commitment from participants, as a supportive listener

not only encourages participants to continue sharing but also helps make the process more enjoyable, mitigating the potential ethical challenge of overburdening participants that can arise from long-term journal keeping.

Moreover, self-reported data do not directly capture participants' noticing of L2 pragmatics in daily life but rely on their self-reports of noticing. In other words, the journal entry not only relied on participants' awareness of L2 pragmatics but also on their commitment to this research. Tina, the most active participant, specified that she enjoyed keeping learning journals as it distracted her from academic pressure, and journal-writing as a reflective process fostered her in-depth understanding of language, culture, and interpersonal relationships. On the other hand, there could have been situations in which participants noticed learning gaps but chose not to share, or where noticing occurred but did not raise explicit attention. Compared to recorded written or oral exchanges, learning journals do not capture precise linguistic details of conversations. However, the limitations of the small sample size and self-reported data are compensated for by the longitudinal, in-depth data from an emic perspective, providing broad access to participants' noticing and sense-making of L2 pragmatics in richly described contexts. These types of pragmatics learning incidents are not directly observable via other devices, and they provide fresh insight into the field by shifting attention from what researchers take interest in (e.g., learners' use of specific speech acts in specific situations) to what causes confusion and difficulty for learners themselves in authentic communication.

6.   Implications for ESL/EFL tutors and higher education institutions

This study offers insights into how institutions and tutors might help international students find their place in their adopted communities by providing pragmatic-specific support. Despite the focus of this research on Chinese students, the pedagogical implications could extend to other SA learners who have limited exposure to authentic English communication prior to their time abroad. Evidence in this study exemplified how linguistic barriers and unfamiliar conventions in interpersonal communications can influence their abilities "to do things with words and to function as a person" (Benson et al., 2012, p. 183). Nevertheless, the support that most students receive from their university only relates to their academic subjects. Through probing into the SA experience from the students' perspective, this study highlights the benefits of pragmatics-related support at the pre-departure stage (e.g., language courses, SA preparation training) and in the higher education context during SA (e.g., pre-sessional and in-sessional English for Academic Purposes

courses, academic, and career workshops, and online resources for independent learning).

Some previous studies (e.g., Halenko & Jones, 2017; Thuy Nguyen & Pham, 2022; Wang & Halenko, 2022a) have indicated the effectiveness of explicit pragmatics teaching. Findings in this study more specifically suggest that language tutors or SA facilitators may start with the two social occasions with which SA students tend to struggle. One is interactions between students and staff (especially academic tutors), which plays an essential role in learner motivation, learning experience, academic success, and a sense of belonging to the university (Rivera Munoz et al., 2020). The other occasion is how to initiate and maintain daily informal conversations (e.g., small talk), a common form of social exchange involving sophisticated conversational and sociocultural skills. Such support may help SA students from EFL backgrounds overcome social awkwardness stemming from L2 pragmatic gaps.

Moreover, this study suggests the value of raising learner-centered pragmatic awareness and scaffolding L2 learners with self-regulated learning strategies. *Learner-centered awareness* here refers not only to learners' sensitivity towards the gaps between their interlanguage and specific standards (e.g., native-speaker norms, host-country conventions) but deliberate attention to pragmatics-related issues and topics they themselves encounter in real-life communication. As Taguchi (2018) pointed out, studies regarding instructional intervention have focused mainly on teaching specific speech acts. However, studies have suggested that many learners fail to retain the taught linguistic forms in the long term (Alcón-Soler, 2015; Halenko & Jones, 2017). On the other hand, by developing pragmatic awareness and voluntary learning strategies, students are more likely to gain autonomy and take the lead in their learning. This approach is thus more likely to result in sustainable learning effects. This is supported by Matsumura's (2022) study, which exemplifies how students used metacognitive pragmatic strategies — learned through explicit-inductive instruction in pre-departure sessions — to analyze new pragmatic features encountered in real-life situations abroad. For learners in the English as second language (ESL) environment, the learning journals used as data collection tools in this research could also serve as pedagogical tools. Students can be encouraged to become field researchers and gather pragmatics-related data from their SA experiences, with proper guiding questions drawing learners' attention to pragmatic features of their daily conversations. Students' observations, questions, and interpretations can then feed into classroom discussions to make the teaching more student-centered.

During this process, it is necessary for the instructors to familiarize learners with the conventional form-meaning connections in the target community. Findings have shown that SA students can easily fall into misinterpretation and over-generalization when making L2 pragmatic judgements. The misinterpretation

sometimes leads to unconventional pragmatic usage, working against the sojourners' wish to choose contextually appropriate language. More specifically, instructors may help learners understand how specific actions may lead to certain interpersonal effects (e.g., what is usually considered rude or inappropriate) (Padila Cruz, 2015). If overgeneralization or misassumptions emerge in students' journals or discussions, instructors can encourage them to pay closer attention to target pragmatic features in real-life contexts, share and discuss their experiences with peers, and provide corrective feedback when appropriate. Tutors may also guide students to compare new and existing knowledge, moving beyond recognizing different linguistic forms to exploring the sociocultural reasons behind these divergences. It is hoped that such tutor guidance will further support a learner-centered approach to metapragmatic awareness, where students become more conscious of the relationship between linguistic forms and contextual factors and develop intercultural awareness.

However, it is worth noting that the researcher is not encouraging a rigid native-speaker-centered normative system in pragmatics teaching, nor suggesting that learners should always adopt the cultural and linguistic norms of the host community. As exemplified in studies focusing on L2 pragmatics and learner identities (e.g., Li et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2022; Nogami, 2020), learners sometimes resist adhering to what they see as standard British native speaker norms, choosing instead to use the unconventional but more authentic-to-self forms after engaging with new forms explicitly and analytically. The purpose of familiarizing students with the pragmatic conventions or providing corrective feedback is to enable them to achieve communicative purposes effectively without unintentionally presenting themselves negatively (e.g., being rude or insincere); it is also to provide sociocultural and pragmalinguistic knowledge and resources for students to make more informed language decisions in various new communicative contexts. In this process, learners' existing linguacultural knowledge can be actively utilized as a resource for interpreting and making sense of new pragmatic features.

Funding

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Appendix A. Instructions on learning journals (texts in the meeting slides)

Definitions:

–   **pragmatic competence:** ability to use appropriate language in specific contexts, in order to achieve social purposes and manage social relationships
–   **sociopragmatics:** social, cultural, and contextual factors that affect language use (e.g. interpersonal distance, social power gap, degree of imposition, shared expectations in a community)
–   **pragmalinguistics:** specific linguistic items used to express the intention (e.g. I want a beer. / Can I have a beer? / I wouldn't mind having a beer. / A beer would be nice.)

What you need to do:

1.   Share with me your daily interactions that involve pragmatics learning in both academic and non-academic contexts.

2.   It can be something you find interesting, stimulating, confusing and even awkward — anything that catches your attention.

3.   It can be related to language use: choice of words, sentence structure, intonation, etc.

4.   It can also be something just about culture: people's expectations, habits, behaviour, ways to communicate, etc.

5.   You need to describe the situation for me, and share with me your actions, feelings and thoughts.

6.   If you are not sure whether an event is relevant, please share it with me, or ask for clarifications at any time.

7.   You can use either text or audio recordings (the latter may save you some time).

8.   You can use either Chinese or English.

9.   I'll respond to your messages. The whole process will be like chatting with a friend.

10.   We'll discuss your stories together in the interviews

Examples for learning journals:

Clip 1:

I invited my British friend to my place for dinner. After she finished the food on her plate, I asked her if she wanted some more. She said, 'I'm fine. Thanks'. I noticed this is a different way to reject an offer politely. I usually say 'No, thanks', but I feel 'I'm fine' sounds milder and less direct. It sounds a better expression and more polite if I want to say no when my friend kindly offers me something. So, I think I'll use that phrase in the future.

Clip 2:

After I arrived in Leeds, I soon found most Uber drivers would say 'How are you?' to me and try to start a small chat, asking questions like 'Where are you from?' However, not many drivers in China chat with customers. I began to wonder whether talking with taxi drivers is a social expectation that I need to follow, and I tried intentionally to maintain conversations with drivers since then. After a while, I asked my friend who had been in the UK for longer, but he didn't think it was necessary. I also asked an Uber driver whether he preferred customers to chat with him; he said he didn't mind. After that, I still say 'How are you?', because I think it's basic politeness, but I don't keep chatting with them every time, especially when I'm tired.

Clip 3:

I wrote an email to my tutor because I wanted him to read and comment on my writing, but I was worried he might be busy at that time, and I didn't want him to rush; so, I wrote a sentence at the end of the email: 'Please take your time'. However, when I talked with my friend, she said 'take your time' is usually used by people in a more powerful position, like teachers to students, or supervisors to team members. I felt a little bit embarrassed. I hope he didn't think I was impolite. I guess he will understand because I'm an international student. International students make mistakes.

Appendix B. Original learning journals: Three examples from Mary

【10/2019】

Mary: 我和我朋友上次去学那个踢踏舞，我们一直踩不对点，找不到节奏，自由练习的时候一个英国女生主动过来教我们跳，我们都很感激她，我估计我朋友也很激动，就对她说了句：'I like your smell!' 我当时比较震惊，心里正纳闷，我看到那个英国女生也比较尴尬，明显愣了一下，我马上戳我朋友，她好像没反应过来，所以我就马上纠正说：she likes your smile! 这时我们都笑了！后来和我朋友交流这件事，她说是自己发错音了，一直把双元音smile发成单元音smell，我当时还以为她想说I like your perfume! 不过我感觉外国人会比较介意讨论香水这个问题，因为是比较私密的东西，所以就赶紧救场，没想到阴差阳错，果然是因为语音的问题导致的。

【04/2020】

Mary: 我最近越来越觉得思维方式是跨文化交流的一个很重要的方面，我总是下意识地用汉语的思维方式，比如说前两周去hiking，中途有点累想让我后面的人先走，脱口而出的就是'you first'，其实我知道应该要说'after you'，但是当时下意识的反应就'你先走'，而且这种情况发生了好多次，每次给人让路，或者进电梯的时候，我总是下意识说'you first'，说完就懊恼。我主要觉得是一个礼貌方面的远近问题，我们习惯于让别人先，就是表示尊敬，这边人的思维是在你之后表示尊敬，我感觉这些语言表达背后是思维方式的差异。

【04/2020】

Mary: 再有就是我发现这边人很喜欢别人称呼他们的given name。对我来说这是一个稍微比较波折的发现，最开始我喜欢叫别人first name，觉得比较亲切。后来发现文献中的所有引用都是last name，我感觉姓氏一般用在比较严肃和正式的场合，那之后每次给我们老师发邮件的时候我都是first name + last name。但是他们每次回复我都是Dear Mar，最后的署名也是自己的first name，所以我后来就感觉其实他们是希望被称呼first name的，师生之间的那种距离关系感觉比国内要近，这应该还是文化层面的东西。

Appendix C. Guide questions for member-checking

1. While reading this chapter and revising your experience, do you feel you disagree with some parts in my writing (e.g. You think I've misinterpreted your meaning, thoughts or intention)?
2. Do you feel this chapter has left out some SA experience that you consider very important or meaningful in your personal development?
3. Do these themes and stories remind you of other relevant experiences you would like to add that were not mentioned earlier?
4. Revising your SA experience after being back in China for three months, do you feel you have experienced changes or have new reflections about the content covered in this chapter?
5. Any comments or thoughts about this chapter are welcome. Please do not feel hesitant to share.

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