

# Introduction

Noël R. Houck and Donna H. Tatsuki

This is the second of two volumes designed to provide English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers with information on pragmatics-based research for the classroom. Whereas the first volume, *Pragmatics: Teaching Speech Acts*, focuses on an area traditionally associated with pragmatics, this volume expands the domain to include conventional expressions. *Pragmatics: Teaching Natural Conversation* emphasizes those that are consistently used in the performance of particular speech acts, as well as characteristics of interactional sequences—from the fluent production of relevant, coherent next turns to the construction of telephone openings and closings. This volume also offers an approach for investigating the discursive practices of the learner’s community.

The need for resources for teaching pragmatics to learners who have little opportunity to engage in appropriate linguistic behavior outside the classroom has long been recognized. As R. Ellis (2009) notes, “there is clear evidence that the kind of communication that takes place in the classroom may restrict learners’ access to the kinds of interactional acts needed to ensure the development of pragmatic competence” (p. 9). In addition, there is a growing awareness that simply exposing learners to grammatically appropriate sentences is inadequate and that, as Bardovi-Harlig (2001) states, “making contextualized pragmatically appropriate input available to learners from early stages of acquisition onward is the very least that pedagogy should aim to do” (p. 31).

The first half of this volume includes activities based on research on the pragmatic use of formulas, or *conventional expressions* as they are referred to when the focus is on strings of words that are regularly used by a particular speech community (Bardovi-Harlig, 2009). Two strands of research on formulas/conventional expressions in speech have been pursued over the past few decades. In second language acquisition, in contrast to the emphasis on rule-based theories of language, a number of researchers (e.g., N. C. Ellis, 1996, 2007; Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1992; Pawley & Syder, 1983; Schmidt & Frota, 1986; Wray, 2002) have noted that a much larger part of English consists of patterns or memorized chunks than had been previously theorized (c.f., Chomsky, 1959; Dulay, Burt, & Krashen,

1982). For instance, the expression *time is over* is grammatical and acceptable, yet it is rarely used; *time's up* is the conventional pattern.

In a strand related to conventional expressions in speech act production, researchers such as Manes and Wolfson (1981) have pointed out that speech acts such as compliments, which are often thought to be generally spontaneous and creative, are usually performed in English using routines or predictable syntactic patterns. At the same time, other researchers focusing on linguistic and social characteristics of seemingly simple routines such as *thanks/you're welcome* have noticed that these are often not as uncomplicated as they appear (see chapter 3 in this volume). The contributions to this volume are designed to focus teacher attention on conventional expressions and patterns as objects worthy of classroom attention.

The second half of the volume focuses on interaction, which includes turn-taking, initiations and responses, and interactional sequences in both formal academic and informal conversational discourse. Long ignored but crucial to ESL learners, these aspects of conversation have benefited from the research on interaction emanating from conversation analysis (CA), from the earliest studies (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974; Schegloff, Jefferson, & Sacks, 1977) to more recent work on the relevance of CA concepts to the language classroom (Hellerman, 2008; Mori, 2002; Seedhouse, 2004; Wong & Waring, 2010). Researchers using CA have developed an unrivaled ability to characterize not only conversation but institutional discourse as well. They have looked at aspects of conversation that had been ignored, but which are of crucial relevance to second language learners—areas such as characteristics of fluent turn-taking, systematic variation in response shapes, functions of different response tokens, and organization of sequences.

Teachers attempting to engage learners in oral communication often do not see the need to spend time on language beyond the sentence level; that is, they assume that if students can construct grammatical sentences, they can by extension produce conversational sequences. This is perhaps partly because native speakers feel no need to concentrate on the language involved in activities that are, to them, straightforward. Rather, they tend to rely on textbooks to provide authentic, accurate representations of interaction in the target language. Unfortunately, insights based on research describing characteristics of real language use have been slow to trickle into teaching materials. Thus, when teachers do attempt to teach sequences, they may rely on published language instructional materials that are inadequate, incomplete, or erroneous in their treatment and discussion of pragmatic conversation skills (Bernsten, 2002; Bardovi-Harlig, 2001; Boxer & Pickering, 1995; Grant & Starks, 2001; Vellenga, 2004; Wong, 1984, 2002, 2007). They may not be aware of mismatches between textbook dialogue and real conversation in terms of sequence structure, although they may have a vague sense that the scripted dialogues they are relying on are unnatural or stilted. Complementing the chapters on conventional expressions and conversational

sequences, this volume also provides learners with guidance in principled observations of aspects of second language use.

The section on conventional expressions (chapters 2–6) begins with an orientation for teachers on how to assess students' current state of knowledge. The remaining four chapters in the section, as well as four of the chapters on conversational sequences, follow a classic sequencing of tasks. They move from awareness raising to some form of identification, often followed by a discussion of the form and its distribution. Students are then provided with opportunities for guided or controlled production. Two of the chapters on conversational sequencing take an integrated approach to awareness raising and production in that learners learn about the practices as they perform them. In addition, the final chapter guides learners through steps for completing an ethnographic analysis.

Thus, *Pragmatics: Teaching Natural Conversation* extends the boundaries of interest from pedagogical applications of research on linguistic action, launched in *Pragmatics: Teaching Speech Acts*, to classroom applications of new areas of research on authentic talk in interaction. It offers some of the first published materials for guiding learners past grammar into authentic-sounding (conventional) utterances and sequences, as well as resources for observing these aspects of language on their own.

The chapters in *Pragmatics: Teaching Speech Acts* provide information and activities primarily related to the realization of speech acts and the effect of different contexts on the form used to realize the act. This volume focuses more closely on (a) the role of conventional expressions or patterns in expressing actions; (b) the characteristics of longer sequences and the work involved in producing them fluently, coherently, and appropriately, as reported in studies on talk in interaction; and (c) resources for students to use in observing and identifying authentic language patterns.

Chapters 2–6 concentrate on pragmatic formulas used to convey common meanings or acts. Chapter 2, “Assessing Familiarity With Pragmatic Formulas: Planning Oral/Aural Assessment,” by Kathleen Bardovi-Harlig, differs from other chapters in the volume in that it provides a means by which teachers can evaluate learners' familiarity with natural conventional expressions such as those used in many English speech acts. A listening-based recognition task provides teachers with a model for determining the differences between learner and native-speaker knowledge of common phrases.

Recent research into the use of conventional expressions by learners of English as a second language has shown noticeable differences between native speakers and English language learners even in such simple expressions as *thank you* and *thanks*. In chapter 3, “No, Thanks. I'm Full! Raising Awareness of Expressions of Gratitude and Conventional Expressions,” Kathleen Bardovi-Harlig and Edelmira Nickels present a series of activities designed to improve learners' ability to produce thanking expressions.

Chapter 4, “Oh, I'm So Sorry! Are You All Right? Teaching Apologies,”

by Carmella Lieske, limits its focus to apologies that result from bumping into someone. After providing a brief overview of the most widely used strategies for performing apologies in general, Lieske concentrates on the particular strategies typically produced by Americans who bump into others and guides learners to produce apologies appropriate to subtle contextual factors.

In chapter 5, “Have You Paid Someone a Compliment Today?,” Jessie Carduner provides a resource for teaching compliments and compliment responses in a sequenced set of activities that diagnose students’ current ability to produce compliments and responses in English, instructs learners on the conventional nature of most English compliments, provides opportunities to recognize different compliment and compliment response forms, and then presents activities that offer students a chance to produce and respond to compliments.

After reviewing appropriate compliment forms and topics, in chapter 6, “Male and Female Complimenting Behavior,” Anne McLellan Howard provides a springboard for discussion about the differences in complimenting behavior between men and women.

In chapter 7, “Taking Turns and Talking Naturally: Teaching Conversational Turn-Taking,” the first of six chapters on turn-taking and sequence organization, Donald Carroll makes a case for teaching and practicing the norms of conversational turn-taking in the EFL/ESL classroom. He begins by presenting some common misperceptions about how turn-taking works in conversation and then provides a brief overview of a more accurate description of conversational turn-taking, as revealed by studies in CA. Carroll then offers a series of activities that have been used successfully to sensitize students to the practices of conversational turn-taking, with a particular focus on helping students appreciate the communicative importance of “jumping into the conversation” at the right time.

Chapter 8, “Teaching Preference Organization: Learning How Not to Say ‘No,’” also by Donald Carroll, introduces a phenomenon known as *preference organization*, which refers to the characteristics of different types of responses to the same action. Carroll provides a series of activities that can be used to teach, for example, how to accept an invitation, as opposed to how to reject it.

Chapter 9, “Pragmatic Competency in Telephone Conversation Openings,” by Jean Wong, fills the pedagogical void related to teaching learners how to open telephone conversations. Wong begins by explaining the nature of openings in real telephone talk in English and then presents an activity that instructors can use to have ESL and EFL learners practice telephone openings, using excerpts from real telephone conversations.

In chapter 10, “Pragmatic Competency in Telephone Conversation Closings,” Jean Wong goes on to introduce teachers to CA findings on closings and the preclosings that lead to closings in telephone conversations. She offers awareness-raising activities and opportunities to recognize and practice the various stages of preclosings and closings, using materials from actual interactions.

Chapter 11, “Responders: Continuers,” by David Olsher, addresses an

important part of spoken communication that is often ignored or oversimplified in English teaching materials—the small responses given by a listener that play important functions in showing an understanding of what a speaker is saying and that allow the speaker to continue with an extended stretch of talk. Minimal response tokens, or *responders*, include (among others) *oh*, *uh-huh/mm-hm*, and *yeah*. Olsher presents a set of responders that function as continuers. After an overview of continuers and their intonation, he focuses on *uh-huh/mm-hm*, *yeah*, and *right*, with awareness-raising, identification, and speaking activities.

In chapter 12, “Responders: Change-of-State Tokens, News Markers, and Assessments,” David Olsher takes the discussion further to guide teachers in familiarizing learners with three additional types of responders (*oh*, *really*, and assessments such as *great*, *that’s neat*, and *sounds good*) while developing learners’ understanding of their meanings and their effect on the sequence in progress through identification and production activities.

In chapter 13, “Developing Students’ Language Awareness,” Maria Dantas-Whitney describes how to foster awareness of a wide range of language phenomena through learner participation in a language research project. The project entails formulating research questions, generating hypotheses, and conducting ethnographic observations of interactions in the community in order to build students’ understanding about social and academic uses of language. A central component of the project is the use of Hymes’s (1972) SPEAKING framework for analyzing speech events.

In sum, this volume makes new theoretical findings accessible to teachers and relevant to the language classroom. At the same time, it offers a range of pedagogical activities for teachers to put to immediate use. Taken together, *Pragmatics: Teaching Speech Acts* and *Pragmatics: Teaching Natural Conversation* offer a comprehensive basis for the theoretically sound and pedagogically effective teaching of an important, but often neglected area of language.

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