The 'secret rules of language': Tackling pragmatics in the classroom

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ABSTRACT

In this article, I would like to focus on how we can help learners to understand what one exasperated student once referred to as 'the secret rules of language' (Bardovi-Harlig 2001), that is the norms of interaction which experienced members of a speech community follow as they use language in their day-to-day business. These relate to such apparently mundane activities as how appropriate it is to say 'thank you' to particular speakers in particular contexts, how much to soften the impact of what you are saying, how long to wait before you answer a question, how informal to be in a particular context, and so on. It can be most frustrating for learners who have made great efforts to master the vocabulary, syntax and phonology of a language only to find themselves misunderstood because of their failure to heed some of the less visible, but nonetheless crucial and systematic, principles which underpin 'appropriate' interaction in a culture. Indeed, until some miscommunication occurs many learners – and native speakers – are not only unsure of what these secret rules are, but may even be only vaguely aware of their existence.

I begin by considering the nature of these 'secret rules', why they are important and what some of them might look like for speakers of Australian English. I then explore how such aspects of language use can be addressed in the classroom and suggest some approaches and activities designed to help adult learners preparing to enter the workforce.

Interpersonal pragmatics

The 'secret rules of language' referred to above relate to aspects of language use that fall under the general umbrella of pragmatics, which can be defined broadly as:

> the study of speaker and hearer meaning created in their joint actions that include both linguistic and nonlinguistic signals in the context of socioculturally organized activities. (Lo Castro 2003: 15)

Speakers routinely intend a meaning which is not entirely conveyed by the literal sense of what is said, hence the distinction between locution (what is said) and illocution (intended meaning) (Austin 1962: 98–108). Misunderstanding is less common than it might be between speakers,

because members of the same speech community rely heavily on shared conventions of speaking in order to accurately interpret and convey meaning in context (Gumperz 1982, 1996; Ochs 1993). While some of these aspects of pragmatics – for example indirectness or the very idea that a speaker may not say everything that they intend – might be universal to all speakers of all languages, others vary systematically across situations, across time and, of crucial relevance to learners from other cultures, across communities and cultures.

The distinction proposed by Thomas (1983) between sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic aspects of language use can be helpful in understanding the conventions and norms that underpin 'successful' communication in a culture. Sociopragmatic norms relate to the cultural values and expectations that underlie communication in a community, for example shared understandings about role relationships, what may or may not be talked about in different contexts, how far hierarchical difference should be overtly signalled in interaction, and so on. Pragmalinguistic aspects of communication cover the linguistic means at the disposal of community members to convey their intended meaning, for example what devices can be used to soften requests or to show warmth and friendliness, such as the use of diminutives by Greek speakers to show warmth (Sifianou 1992b), or indirect request forms by English speakers to signal a lack of imposition (Wierzbicka 1991: 77).

Both sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic aspects of language use vary across different situations and cultures, as well as over time. For example, socio-pragmatic expectations of how a speaker should perform in a particular role or social identity, such as the role of 'teacher', may be different in English-speaking Western cultures from those in Chinese-speaking cultures, and this will have an impact on what is considered to be appropriate linguistic behaviour in a situation. Many Australians involved in teaching students from 'Confucian-heritage' cultures (Biggs 1996) have noted that they appear to have different understandings of the student-teacher relationship than do 'local' students. These differences have an impact upon the way these students talk to their teachers, in that they may behave more deferentially towards them and appear more reluctant to argue with them (Hofstede 1994; Cortazzi and Jin 1996). Similarly, the values and expectations underlying a service encounter in a Middle Eastern market are very different to those in a London department store, and these will lead to a very different use of language in each context, and so on.

Pragmalinguistically, too, the repertoire of devices available in any language, their pragmatic force and the use that speakers make of them may vary across languages. The fact that a particular device exists in two languages does not necessarily mean that it will have the same force or impact in both,

or that community members will use them with a similar frequency (Fraser 1985). The phrase 'of course' is a good example of the unintentional offence that can be caused when learners simply translate a pragmalinguistic resource from their own language and assume that it has the same force in English. While phrases with a similar meaning of emphatic 'yes' may exist in many languages, the particular force that the phrase has in English of 'yes, and it is obviously so' is often absent. This different mapping of force onto form may mystify learners who innocently transfer assumptions based on their own language and are misunderstood: they mean 'yes', but they may be understood as saying more like 'yes, you idiot!'.

The importance of interpersonal pragmatics

Such conventions may appear to be a form of 'secret rules' to those who have grown up speaking another language or variety in another culture, because community members are socialised into the conventions of language use from an early age, a process that is largely unconscious (Ochs 1988, 1996). As a result, speakers are likely to regard them as fundamental values which are natural, rather than as the relatively arbitrary conventions of language use within a particular culture. It is, therefore, often only when communication breaks down in some way that speakers become aware of them. Thus, for example, in Anglo-Western cultures the routine use of 'please' and 'thank you' is considered to be sociopragmatically appropriate behaviour in a wide range of situations. However, in other cultures, such as the Vietnamese culture, it is regarded as quite insulting to 'thank' a close family member for per-forming a routine task, since it implies that they were unwilling to do it and are therefore failing in their family responsibilities (Ha 1998).

It is this 'secret' nature of many sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic conventions that makes them particularly hazardous for learners. This is because learners are likely to transfer the sociopragmatic norms and pragma-linguistic conventions they follow in their first culture and language into the use of their second[1] without fully realising what they are doing, and, where there is a mismatch, miscommunication may occur (Thomas 1983). Whereas phonological difficulties or problems with vocabulary or syntax are visibly related to language competence issues, problems with sociopragmatic or pragmalinguistic conventions are not, and learners are likely to be judged harshly as human beings, rather than leniently as learners. Thus, learners who transfer from their first culture the assumption that it is unnecessary to say 'thank you' in particular English-speaking situations are likely to be seen as arrogant and rude, rather than as in the process of developing their intercul-tural competence. Such misunderstandings serve to fuel unhelpful cultural stereotypes, such as the 'arrogant Russians', the 'cold British' and so on.

Although experience in the community can raise learners' awareness of such conventions, there is also a role for explicit instruction, particularly in relation to behaviour in situations and roles they are likely to encounter less regularly in the second culture (for example, Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford 1996). Instruction cannot only raise consciousness of these aspects of language use, but also counterbalance previous teaching which may have been misleading (Bardovi-Harlig 2001), as textbooks often present a rather 'sanitised' version of dialogues (Liddicoat 2000; Bardovi-Harlig and Mahan-Taylor 2003; Lo Castro 2003: 316).

However, teachers may sometimes be reluctant to tackle cultural issues because of sensitivity to cultural or linguistic imperialism (Phillipson 1992; Pennycook 1998), or because they feel that they should be teaching English as an international language and not relate it to a particular English-speaking group (for example, Kramsch 1998; Jenkins 2000). Moreover, from a critical perspective the responsibility for miscommunication does not rest solely with the learner, but should be shared so that native speakers learn to adapt to different ways of speaking. In any interaction, the attitude and disposition of both parties are crucial in determining how behaviours will be understood and responded to, and intolerance for alternative modes of expression can frequently be allied to overt or covert racism.

Shea (1994), for example, warns against approaches to pragmatics that assume a culture is uniform or that norms are value-free, arguing that we must also take into account the larger social and political context which generates 'top-down' assumptions that speakers bring to a text which 'skew "accurate" (and "intended") interpretation' (Shea 1994: 360). Such arguments are persuasive. However, in the shorter term, particularly in view of the very secret nature of the conventions under discussion here, there is a strong argument for at least acquainting learners who wish to interact with native speakers of a community with some of the more widely shared sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic norms. In doing this, though, as teachers we should be alert to the dangers of interpreting cultural norms naïvely or prescriptively. Our responsibility, it seems to me, is to provide sufficient information for learners (or any speaker) to be able to relate creatively or normatively to the routine interactive practices of the community in which they find themselves (Fairclough 1989), and to act in ways which allow them to achieve their personal goals within the larger social context in which they are communicating (Hall 1999).

Discovering interactive practice

However, it is by no means straightforward to describe what the native-speaker norms of a community are, since native-speaker intuitions are

notoriously unreliable (Wolfson 1989). Moreover, any individual speaker can relate normatively or creatively to the 'norms' of a culture, and that culture itself is neither static nor monolithic, but dynamic, constantly evolving and characterised by diversity. I do not see this as a reason for inaction, however, but rather as an argument in favour of constant vigilance against complacency with regard to what we 'know' about any culture, even if we think we are 'experts'.

Sensitive empirical research seems to offer teachers the best insight into what the interactive practices in a community might be. There have been an increasing number of studies in cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics that have compared native-speaker[2] performance of the same speech act or event in different languages and cultures, or with the performance of learners. These have provided useful descriptions or pointers for instruction (for example, see studies and overviews in Rose and Kasper 2001). Many have investigated American or British English (for example, Blum-Kulka 1992, 1997; Sifianou 1992a; Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford 1993; Eslamirasekh 1993; Trosborg 1995; Huang 1996; Yu 1999). In the following section I would like to outline briefly some of the features highlighted in recent Australian research and its implications for teaching practice in Australia.

Conventions in Australian communities of practice

Below I would like to draw on three recent studies to illustrate the kinds of interactive practices which learners preparing to enter the workforce in Australia might find useful. In the first of these (Yates 2000), trainee teachers from an Anglo background and from a Chinese background were recorded teaching in Australian secondary classrooms. A practical motivation for the study came, in part, from reports of communication breakdown between students and some teachers from non-Anglo backgrounds, which although attributed to language proficiency appeared more closely related to clashes of teaching culture and interactive style. The aim of the study was to explore how each group of trainee teachers used mitigation strategies and devices to soften the impact of the directives they gave to the students in their classes. As a directive or request[3] is a face-threatening act (Brown and Levinson 1987), it is often softened. Previous studies had suggested that speakers of Australian English may soften their requests more frequently, and vary the politeness level of the request less frequently, across different situations than speakers of other languages (Blum-Kulka and House 1989).

The study investigated the use of devices associated with formal politeness, such as 'please', and conventionally indirect forms, such as 'could you do X'. These, although associated with a requestive rather than a 'commanding'

intent, nevertheless put the directive 'on record' and thereby distanced the speaker from the addressee (Lakoff 1973). The use of more solidary strategies was also explored. These addressed students' need to be approved of and included within the group (what Brown and Levinson 1987 refer to as *positive* face), and included lexical forms such as the use of colloquial language or syntactic modifications which deflect directive force in a non-distancing way, such as 'what you need to do now is X' (for a fuller discussion of these devices, see Yates 2000). In the example below, a trainee teacher first asks his year seven class to come into the music room using a direct form. As they do so, however, they make too much noise, and the teacher shows his irritation by repeating his request, this time using more expressions of formal politeness!

EXAMPLE I

- So *come in* quietly.
- Quietly year seven.
- *Excuse me* year seven *could you* go back outside and line up *please*.

(Yates 2000: 134)

The study revealed considerable variation between trainee teachers from both backgrounds, both in the kinds of devices that they used to mitigate their directives and in how frequently they made use of them. This diversity serves as a useful reminder that individuals in any community will make their own choices as to how to use the linguistic resources available to project their own identities and achieve their own goals (Yates forthcoming). It was, nevertheless, also clear from the data that the trainee teachers from an Anglo background, particularly the females, softened their directives more frequently than did the Chinese-background trainees. They also used far more solidary strategies. Whereas the native speakers would reduce the social distance between themselves and the students in various ways – for example by addressing them as 'guys' or 'mate', or using colloquial language and humour to soften the impact of their directives – the Chinese-background teachers, even those who used other softening devices as frequently as their Anglo-background peers, tended to use more formal distancing devices and fewer solidary strategies. In other words, while the native speakers regularly reduced social distance and appealed to in-group membership as a means of influencing the behaviour of their students, the Chinese teachers were less likely to do this, relying, instead, on more formal and distancing ways of reducing the 'face' threat inherent in many directives. Perhaps, accustomed to a culture of more hierarchical student-teacher relationships, they did not play out the 'fiction of egalitarianism' in the same way. The overall impression formed by inter-locutors and colleagues might be that those Chinese-background teachers

who did not soften their directives could be seen as 'bossy', while those who did soften their directives, but with formally polite devices rather than solidary ones, might be seen as cold. It seems that the Anglo teachers were following 'secret rules', which included the minimisation of imposition and the reduction of social distance. The Chinese-background teachers, however, were less likely to soften their requests at all, and were more likely to be formal and signal greater social distance than their Anglo counterparts.

These findings suggest that trainee teachers from Chinese and, perhaps, other backgrounds might benefit from explicit discussion of both the socio-pragmatic expectations of the social role of teachers in an Australian context, and explicit attention to the kinds of devices which can be used to soften directives in a less distancing way.

Similarly, the findings from two other recent studies[4] (Wigglesworth and Yates 2001, 2002; Yates, Guilfoyle and Howell 2003) investigating interactive practices in Australian workplaces suggest some areas of study which learners may find useful to their understanding of workplace communication. Both used role-play data to explore the performance of complex negotiating tasks.

The first of these (Wigglesworth and Yates 2001; see also Yates and Wigglesworth forthcoming) compared, through role-plays, the ways in which native speakers and intermediate-level learners[5] requested leave from their 'boss' at a busy time of the year. The study found a number of sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic differences in how the native speakers (NS) and non-native speakers (NNS) performed the task. At the sociopragmatic level, it appeared that the NS and NNS had a different appreciation of the role-relationship and attendant rights and responsibilities: the NS more often constructed the event as if collaborating with the boss in solving a problem, while the NNS more often constructed the event as though asking a favour which the boss could help them with.

A few NNS used 'respect' greetings, such as 'Good morning, manager', which overtly signalled hierarchical difference, whereas only one of the NS did this. NNS were also less likely to make offers of repair, or prepare the way for their request through the use of greetings or the provision of context. More NS addressed their 'boss' by their first name and tended more frequently to use 'let's talk' routines to prepare the ground for the main request as a kind of pre-request move, as in Example 2 below.

EXAMPLE 2

    E: oh hello (first name) are you busy? *I was ah just ah wondering if I could talk to you a little bit about annual leave.*

NS also used more moves designed to establish rapport, as in Example 3, and significantly more *disarmers*, moves which explicitly addressed potential objections the boss might have to their request and disarmed them, as in Example 4. In contrast, only four disarmers were produced by NNS, and all of these were delivered with stress and intonation patterns which meant that their likely impact was aggravating rather than mitigating.:

EXAMPLE 3

E: *oo I don't think you're going to be very happy with me.*

B: oh dear that sounds a bit ominous.

E: *oo I've got to do a bit of grovelling.*

EXAMPLE 4

Look *I know this is probably ahm* ( ) *an awkward time.*

Generally, the native speakers used the pragmalinguistic resources of English more frequently and more flexibly, and mitigated their requests more often through hedges and other linguistic means. However, while such features may be crucial in polite interaction, they rarely receive the attention they deserve in the language classroom.

The study by Yates, Guilfoyle and Howell (2003) of NS role-playing complex exchanges in the workplace in Australia found similar socio-pragmatic and pragmalinguistic features which could be useful for learners. For example, in exchanges between employees and their bosses, the study found that both groups made regular use of various devices to soften the impact of acts which may be perceived as face-threatening. In Example 5, the boss wishes to complain to an employee about her lack of punctuality, and uses a positive comment, a hesitation marker 'uh', and the word 'just' to minimise the impact of this topic. Example 6 illustrates the use of the continuous, the past tense and embedding, as well as 'please', to soften a request by an employee to his boss.

EXAMPLE 5

Glad you could uh call in look, I've *just* got a matter to talk to you about.

EXAMPLE 6

Ah Jack, I *was wondering if I could* have a word with you, *please*.

The data from this study also illustrate the way in which speakers use discourse markers, such as 'oh' and 'well', to negotiate various acts and prepare their interlocutors for unpleasant or unexpected information. Through the

use of discourse markers, speakers can signal points of conflict in advance, thereby allowing others to orient themselves to the ongoing flow of information more quickly and with the minimum of overt confrontation. Thus, in Example 7 when C2 does not want to comply with her colleague's request for more details of her job interview, she prepares the way for this by using the words 'oh', 'well', and by laughter.

EXAMPLE 7

>C1: What job are you going for?
>
>C2: *Oh (laugh) well* I'd rather not say but um *(laugh)*.

The study has also highlighted other useful skills for workplace communication, such as how to be assertive in a polite manner, how to reject a suggestion indirectly, how to acknowledge another speaker's point without agreeing to it, and so on.

These and other studies have provided information on the kinds of interactive values and features that non-native speakers might need to know as they engage in workplace communication, and suggest a number of sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic areas that might profitably be focused on in class. However, questions remain as to whether, and how, they can be taught, and how far learners can make use of them in their own interactions. I discuss these issues below.

Approaching instruction

There is increasing evidence that both pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic aspects of pragmatics are teachable. Studies have shown that pragmalinguistic routines and formulae, for example, can be taught quite successfully (House 1996) even at beginner level (Wildner-Basset 1994; Tateyama et al 1997). House (1996), for instance not only demonstrates that such routines can be taught, but also argues that learners benefit in all kinds of ways from having at their disposal such 'islands of reliability' which can ease their cognitive load and enable them to interact more fluently. Pragmalinguistic routines may also provide useful material for learners to 'unpack' later (see, for example, the discussion in Kasper 2001: 42–3). Sociopragmatic norms have also proved amenable to instruction (for example, Liddicoat and Crozet 2001; Rose and Ng 2001).

The issue of how far learners will actually use the pragmatic knowledge that we teach is complex. I would like to make a distinction here between the importance of such knowledge for receptive functions, that is on learners' ability to interpret accurately meaning in context, from how they wish to

use that knowledge productively themselves, that is in their own talk. There can be little argument that learners benefit from knowledge that will help them to interpret accurately an interlocutor's intended meaning. This means that, for receptive purposes at least, it is worth including attention to pragmatic aspects of language in any program. How far a learner productively puts into practice the strategies and devices used by native speakers, however, must remain a matter of personal choice. For example, learners may not put into practice the knowledge they have about native-speaker norms and behaviours, because they may have deep-seated reservations about the 'rightness' of such behaviour (Hinkel 1996). As noted above, we are socialised at an early age into particular ways of thinking and behaving in interaction in our first culture, and so some aspects of interactive behaviour which are routine or expected in the target culture may appear to be wrong or inappropriate. NNS may, therefore, seek to diverge from the way in which NS express themselves, as a means of projecting their individual or group ethnic identity. Chinese-background speakers, for example, may feel that it is fundamentally wrong to reduce social distance between themselves and their students, just as some Anglo-background speakers may find themselves reluctant to adopt conversational stances which are normative in Japanese contexts (Siegal 1996; Cohen 1997).

Moreover, native-speaker-like behaviour by non-native speakers may not be accepted as appropriate by some interlocutors, particularly if the NNS are visibly ethnically different from the majority population (Amin 1997; Tang 1997). Although 'optimal convergence' (Giles, Coupland and Coupland 1991) on native-speaker norms has been argued as an appropriate goal for interlanguage learners, we should not take this to mean behaviour identical to that of native speakers. From an interlocutor's perspective, it may be that there is a certain threshold of 'tolerance' for 'convergence', but that beyond a certain point a speaker's attempts to converge too closely on a native-speaker performance may be perceived as patronising (Giles and Coupland 1991: 79) or 'try hard' (Yates forthcoming). This means that, even if they wanted to, non-native speakers from particular backgrounds may have difficulty addressing interlocutors as 'mate' or employing frequent colloquialisms to reduce social distance. As Kramsch (1993) suggests, speakers need to find 'a third place' in which they can interact in new cultural environments.

The implication is that learners should be aware of norms and patterns of interaction, but that the choice in how far to go in emulating or dealing more creatively with these norms must remain an individual one. From our perspective as teachers, however, it is crucial that we equip learners with the

knowledge that will allow them to be in a position to make that choice, as Hall (1999) argues:

> In learning about the various ways of meaning making within L2 groups, the students develop a critical awareness of language use, and thus, to a certain degree, are empowered to make choices about whether to participate in practices and, when doing so, how to use the resources in ways that will enhance the realization of their own individual goals.   (Hall 1999: 150)

This means finding ways of demystifying 'the secret rules' through our work in the classroom and beyond. In the next section I discuss and illustrate how this might be done with adult learners.

Teaching activities

Although research in cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics (for example, Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper 1989; Sifianou 1992a; Kasper and Blum-Kulka 1993; Trosborg 1995) has provided a wealth of detail on what interactive practices might look like in different languages and cultures, the work in this paradigm has largely focused on comparisons of learner performance with native-speaker norms, and has only more recently turned to developmental and instructional aspects of a learner's pragmatics in an L2 (for example, Ellis 1992; Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford 1993; Cohen 1997; Pham 2001; Rose and Kasper 2001; Achiba 2003). Evaluating the evidence for instruction in pragmatics, Bardovi-Harlig (2001: 32) argues that such work has provided plenty of evidence for systematic differences between the pragmatic systems of native speakers of different cultures and interlanguage learners, but concludes that:

> The most appropriate and effective ways to deliver this information and the manner in which learners integrate such information into a developing interlanguage remain empirical questions.

However, as teachers we cannot wait for all the empirical evidence to be in before we find ways of integrating these aspects of pragmatics into our teaching, and research has provided us with some indication of how to tackle pragmatics in the classroom. As an instructional tactic, it seems reasonable to promote 'noticing' among our learners (Schmidt 1993), that is, to provide them with input in the form of model texts illustrating the sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic features which they may find useful, and activities to enable them to recognise and somehow to engage with these features.

In doing this, explicit teaching approaches seem to be more successful than implicit ones (see, for example, House 1996; Yoshimi 1998a, 1998b, 2001; Takahashi 2001), and there is evidence that some explicit metapragmatic

comment may be beneficial, at least for teaching sociopragmatic aspects of language use. A study by Rose and Ng (2001) compared the effects of inductive and deductive instruction on the use of compliments and compliment responses. Data were collected from three groups of tertiary-level students of English in Hong Kong: two treatment groups and one control group. Both experimental groups had explicit instruction followed by practice activities, but one group was taught using a deductive approach in which explicit metapragmatic explanations were given, while the other was instructed using an inductive approach which allowed the learners to formulate generalisations about patterns on their own without specific metapragmatic information. In post-tests, the students in both experimental groups were found to use more of the appropriate pragmalinguistic formulae than the control group, but those in the deductive group gave more appropriate compliment responses. Since these relate more to sociopragmatic differences between Anglo and Chinese cultures than to pragmalinguistic mapping of force onto form, the authors conclude that sociopragmatic aspects of interaction may be more successfully tackled through instructional approaches which are explicit and deductive.

While general consciousness-raising activities relating to culture, such as those found in O'Sullivan (1994); Fantini (1997) and Tomalin and Stempelski (1993) are useful in class, the detail of interactive practice that learners (and teachers!) need to know about is largely absent. Hall (1999), however, outlines an approach to the teaching of interactive practice, which focuses on the intimate connection between language and culture and encourages learners to research the kind of interactive practice that they want to know more about. Through a 'prosaics of interaction' they develop the skills necessary to notice a particular linguistic resource, to reflect on its meaning in interaction, to formulate and test hypotheses about how it is used and what meanings it conveys, and to develop resources to achieve individual goals within the larger community (Hall 1999: 142). Her framework of analysis offers teachers and learners some general tools to become their own researchers and to investigate areas of interactive practice relevant to them. However, it is less explicit as to the specific of the pedagogical tasks and activities that can be adopted to guide the noticing and the practice in the classroom (Hall 1999: 146–51). Here the focus is on the learners as active researchers, rather than on explicit metapragmatic guidance from the teacher or other sources.

Crozet, Liddicoat and Lo Bianco (1999) suggest a teaching approach which integrates culture into language work while seeking to develop learners' intercultural competence. This allows a view of language as dynamic, and avoids the cultural stereotyping that may emerge from the tacit 'culture as practices' position underpinning much work on culture. It also suggests an

important role for overt comparison between speakers' first and subsequent cultural practices and assumptions.

I would like to draw on these ideas to suggest that we approach the teaching of pragmatics to adults in an eclectic, integrated and reflective way. Since adult learners have already been socialised into different communities of practice, it is important for them to be introduced to pragmatic aspects of language use from the very beginning of their language learning, and that they receive explicit and relevant input. They need the opportunity to 'notice' various sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic features, and the space to reflect upon and experiment with new ways of interacting in a safe and non-threatening environment. Such an approach would, therefore, include the following phases, which are proposed below in a linear fashion but which may be usefully combined in other ways in a teaching-learning cycle:

1   explicit models based on authentic language as illustration;

2   'noticing' activities to focus on pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic features;

3   explicit metapragmatic comment;

4   reflection, comparison and sensitive discussion of sociopragmatic values and pragmalinguistic resources of L1/C1 and L2/C2;

5   practice and experimentation in various contexts inside and outside the classroom;

6   exploration and debriefing of personal reactions and likely community reaction to the use of various features by learners; and

7   the development in learners of the ability to research interactive practices for themselves.

Cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics research has provided us with insights we can use as the basis for our model texts (phase 1) and for metapragmatic comment (phase 3), while culture-teaching approaches have furnished us with a number of ideas for focusing on reflection and exploration (phase 4) and (phase 6). Hall (1999) offers a useful framework of analysis to guide learners in the development of their skills as researchers of interactive practice in the community (phase 7). Below, therefore, I would like to offer some suggestions for practical activities that teachers can use to help learners 'notice' (phase 2) and 'practise' (phase 5) various sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic aspects of language in a structured way.

In an integrated approach, noticing activities would be related to input texts, often dialogues, in which learners are encouraged to identify sociopragmatic values. These can be highlighted through analysis of the linguistic

correlates of communicative values in interaction, that is by directing learners' attention to particular features they can be guided to reflect on the underlying communicative values and how these compare with those in their first language or culture. Such features might include the way in which social relationships are signalled (or not signalled) in a dialogue through devices such as the use of greetings and terms of address, the level of formality adopted and the tone of the exchange. The rights and obligations of the speakers in their social roles might be explored through examining the kinds of moves each makes, and why and when they make them, how speakers react to different kinds of moves and so on. The same dialogues can then be the focus of pragmalinguistic analysis. Learners can be guided by the teacher to identify the role and function of different devices in context, and these can then be highlighted in other contexts and practised in a variety of ways.

Activities taken from a sample unit developed by teachers[6] on the project reported by Yates and Wigglesworth (2002) are based on data collected for that project, and illustrate how this type of noticing might be scaffolded in practice. The first activity introduces the theme of how to soften a request in the workplace by asking learners to listen to and compare two dialogues of the same requestive situation in which an employee asks her boss for leave. In the next activity, learners are asked to listen again to match the words actually said by the employee with a description of the softening function of that move in the dialogue. This is designed to promote noticing of some of the sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic aspects of the model dialogue. Notes on various features, such as the use of first names, are provided for the teacher to use as a basis for discussion. Other noticing activities that can be used with the same dialogue might include instructions for learners to find particular words (for example, 'pretty', 'could') or particular grammatical forms (for example, the continuous in 'I was thinking I could ask ...' or 'I was just wondering if I could ...'), so that the function of these in the dialogue can be overtly examined and compared with devices used in the same situation in the learners' first languages. Follow-up activities give the learners manipulative practice of some of the devices illustrated in the model dialogues, and then support them to use some of the features with progressively less scaffolding by asking them to 'improve' dialogues in the same situation and to construct their own dialogues in similar situations.

Conclusion

What I have tried to argue above is that if our aim is to prepare learners for successful communication in a new community setting, then this involves also paying attention to the secret rules of language use in that setting. By

this I do not mean that we should try to turn learners into well-behaved native speakers or indoctrinate them in 'appropriate' behaviours. Rather, we should foster *their intercultural communicative competence* (Byram 1997) in a way that integrates language and culture, and highlights the skills and knowledge they will need in the community to make decisions about how they want to communicate in English. In this, we should also aim to increase their skills in researching interactive practices beyond the classroom so that they can notice, interpret and analyse these secret rules for themselves. In this way, our classroom instruction can become both 'tools and resources for analyzing their contexts as well as for taking action', so that 'language learning becomes not an end in itself but a means for learners to participate fully in their lives inside and outside school' (Hall 2002: 114).

NOTES

1   Many learners may, of course, be bi- or tri-lingual before they even start to learn English. I use second language here to mean a language learned later in life after early childhood.

2   I use the term 'native speaker' as an imperfect but relatively shorthand way of describing members of a speech community who are competent, long-term users of the language and variety spoken in that community.

3   As Thomas (1995) notes, the technical difference between the two is a matter of context rather than form.

4   Both of these studies were supported by grants under the Department of Immigration and Aboriginal Affairs' SPRP program through the Adult Migrant English Program Research Centre, and were conducted with AMES Victoria.

5   These were learners studying for Certificate III of the Certificates of Spoken and Written English, the national curriculum used by the Adult Migrant English Program in Australia.

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