

Plenary Speech

Contexts and pragmatics learning: Problems and opportunities of the study abroad research

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1. Introduction

Despite different epistemologies and assumptions, all theories in second language (L2) acquisition emphasize the centrality of context in understanding L2 acquisition. Under the assumption that language emerges from use in context, the cognitivist approach focuses on distributions and properties of input to infer both learning objects and process of acquisition. The interactionist approach views context more narrowly by analyzing how a particular linguistic item is attended and processed during a task-based interaction, and how it becomes intake as learning outcomes. For socially-oriented theories such as the sociocultural theory and language socialization, learning is fundamentally situated in context. Through mediated participation in learning as social practice, learners come to appropriate linguistic knowledge. Context is also fundamental in the complex, dynamic systems theory, which views learning as a non-linear, adaptive process emerging through an interaction of resources and individuals within a given context. All of these theories give the central power to context to describe and explain L2 learning. Context serves as the site where acquisition is examined. Context also helps explain the process and outcomes of acquisition.

This paper discusses the centrality of context for pragmatics learning and development. Pragmatic competence, broadly defined as the ability to perform language functions in social interactions, draws heavily on context. Context represents diverse language functions, communicative settings, and personal styles. Through participation in context, learners come to understand the connection between linguistic choices and contextual characteristics that help them perform communicative functions appropriately in situations.

I will first present the current conceptualization of pragmatic competence from a historical perspective. I will then discuss the role of learning contexts in developing this competence. Moving away from the ‘context-as-a-black-box’ approach, recent studies have revealed

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an intricate association between pragmatic practices available in context and individuals' investment in those practices, which shapes learning. Because this trend is most visible in the line of study abroad research, my discussion will focus on the study abroad context as a site for pragmatic development.

2. Pragmatic competence: Evolving definitions

The last four decades has seen an evolution in the definition of pragmatic competence, shifting from the individualistic view of the competence, to more interaction-oriented understanding of the construct. Early models of communicative competence by Bachman & Palmer (1996, 2010) situated pragmatic competence as a core constituent, along with grammatical, discourse, and strategic competence. Bachman & Palmer defined pragmatic knowledge involving two sub-components: functional knowledge and sociolinguistic knowledge. Functional knowledge enables us to interpret relationships between utterances and communicative functions (e.g., knowing a variety of forms that perform the speech act of request), while sociolinguistic knowledge enables us to create utterances that are appropriate in context (e.g., knowing which forms to use when asking a roommate to pass you a TV remote vs. asking a professor to write a letter for your job application). These two types of knowledge correspond to Thomas's (1983) definition of pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics. The former refers to the linguistic forms available for performing a communicative function, while the latter refers to a language user's understanding of the context in which those linguistic forms are used.

Although these early models conceptualized pragmatic competence as knowledge of form-function-context mappings, more recent models have emphasized interaction skills that enable learners to implement this knowledge in interaction. Celce-Murcia (2007) proposed a model that involves interactional competence with two sub-components: ACTION COMPETENCE and CONVERSATION COMPETENCE. ACTION COMPETENCE involves functional knowledge of how to perform speech acts, while CONVERSATIONAL COMPETENCE refers to the knowledge of conversation mechanisms that help realize speech acts (e.g., turn-taking, opening and closing). The centrality of interaction is also seen in a more discursive-oriented model – interactional competence, which views meaning arising from a socio-semiotic system (Hall 1995; Young 2008). Interactional competence considers pragmatic acts as collaboratively constructed among participants and distributed over multiple turns.

I do not consider this evolution as a new model replacing older ones. Rather, I consider this shift as additive, expanding our understanding of what it means to be pragmatically competent. The knowledge of form-function-context mappings (pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic knowledge) is the core of pragmatic knowledge, but this knowledge alone is not sufficient. Interactional competence is equally critical because communication is grounded in social interactions and users of language. During interaction, pragmatic knowledge is not fixed or pre-determined; it is contingent and emergent. Depending on how the interlocutor responds to our proposition, we adjust our forms or functions that we intend to perform. Hence, interactional competence adds another layer to pragmatic knowledge – knowledge that the form-function-mappings are not fixed; participants collaboratively achieve

a communicative goal. This view of competence as a socially co-constructed phenomenon is fundamentally different from the traditional view that competence is essentially a trait of an individual. With this additive view, pragmatic competence is conceptualized as three-fold: (1) knowledge of linguistic forms and their functional meanings; (2) sociocultural knowledge; and (3) the ability to use these knowledge bases to create a communicative act in interaction.

3. Learning contexts and pragmatic development

Having established the definition of pragmatic competence, this section discusses how this competence is learned, focusing on the role of learning contexts. Pragmatic development has been examined in wide-ranging contexts, including study abroad programs, formal classrooms, international workplaces, heritage learner contexts, and technology-enhanced environments (see Taguchi 2015a for a review). Each of these contexts presents unique opportunities for pragmatic practice. This paper focuses on the study abroad context where most findings are currently available, but I will first highlight the recent trends in other under-represented contexts.

Although a formal classroom has long been labeled an input-poor environment where naturalistic pragmatic development hardly takes place, this assumption needs to be revised with the recent findings coming from CLIL (content and language integrated learning) and ELF (English as a lingua franca). Studies revealed that classrooms are full of speech acts that the teacher and students perform in order to conduct their everyday business of teaching and learning (e.g., Nikula 2008; Käätä 2014). They use L2 as a shared language to discuss academic matters, to present their point of view, to persuade others, to give feedback, and to display collegial support. Learners' routine participation in classroom activities promotes their acquisition of these speech acts respective to academic discourse.

The heritage learner context also forms a unique community for pragmatic practice. Heritage learners are immigrants or children of immigrants who grow up acquiring two languages – home language and societal language (Valdes 2005; Kondo-Brown 2006). For heritage learners, pragmatic development occurs simultaneously in two language use contexts, which differ in the types of genres, speech events, and speech styles involved. Diglossia is a feature of the heritage community: the societal language is used for formal, public interactions, while the heritage language is used for casual, informal communication (Lynch 2003). Because of their simultaneous access to two distinct speech communities, heritage learners exhibit a unique, hybrid pragmatic system. Hence, pragmatic transfer, especially bi-directional transfer, can be seen often in heritage learner pragmatics (Pinto & Raschio 2007).

The workplace environment is another unique context for pragmatic development. Immigrants and international business people come to a foreign country with the primary goal of fitting in with the work culture. Naturally, these individuals' pragmatic needs are different from those of study abroad learners, whose stay abroad is a fixed, short term, with no overt, mandate assessment of job performance. Previous studies showed that the pragmatic task that international employees perceive critical is small talk (Timpe-Laughlin, Wain & Schmidgall 2015; Yates & Major 2015). This task is highly unique to the workplace context. We have about three dozen longitudinal studies in L2 pragmatics, but none of these

studies traced the development of the ability to make small talk (although description of small talk exists, e.g., Holmes 2005; Yates 2010). Small talk does not come up for teaching either. In my recent synthesis of 58 instructional studies (Taguchi 2015b), only one study dealt with this skill (Liddicoat & Clozet 2001). Yet, this is the most important pragmatic skill in the workplace, which reminds us that pragmatic needs are specific to context and goals of L2 speakers.

Finally, technology-enhanced contexts have seen a rapid expansion recently. The last decade showcased a number of options of technology-enhanced pragmatics learning: telecollaboration, social networking, blogs, digital games, and mobile devices. I will highlight Holden & Syke's (2013) work on digital games to illustrate this trend. These authors created an iPod-based game for learning Spanish pragmatics. Using this platform, learners solve a murder mystery while interacting with non-player characters (NPC). The game has built-in pragmatic feedback. NPCs have distinct preferences of interaction style: some prefer direct communication, while others like indirect style. Learners have to manipulate their interaction styles to get clues from different NPCs to move through the game plot. This context has a variety of unique features. It provides meaningful, contextualized, and consequential interaction. It also serves as the site for goal-oriented, autonomous, and experiential learning. These characteristics are found in other target language contexts such as study abroad programs or workplaces, but the difference is that this context is essentially virtual. Learners can practice pragmatics in a low-stake environment with no real-life consequences. The context also offers immediate, convenient access to realistic communication catered to individual pace.

4. Study abroad as a context for pragmatics learning

The previous section provided a brief sketch of various learning contexts for pragmatics learning by illustrating characteristics of each context and types of pragmatic practice occurring in that context. This section turns to the study abroad context as a site for pragmatics learning. Study abroad refers to a temporary, pre-scheduled educational stay in a country where the target language is spoken among community members (Kinging 2008). Among various learning contexts, by far, the study abroad context has generated the most empirical findings in pragmatics, as symbolized in seminal book-length publications that have appeared in the field (e.g., Barron 2003; Cook 2008; Kinginger 2008; Schauer 2009; Taguchi 2015c). The popularity of the study abroad context is plausible given the nature of pragmatic competence. As described above, pragmatic competence involves linguistic knowledge, sociocultural knowledge, and the ability to interact using these knowledge bases. Acquiring this knowledge and ability is likely to occur in a study abroad context where learners are exposed to a community full of linguistic and sociocultural practices. The benefits of studying abroad for pragmatics learning are summarized as follows: (1) opportunities to observe local norms of interaction; (2) situated pragmatic practice and feedback on that practice; (3) real-life consequences of pragmatic behavior; and (4) exposure to variation in styles and communicative situations.

Although these benefits appear straightforward, whether they lead to actual outcomes is an empirical question. Previous studies have addressed several critical questions: ‘Is the study abroad context effective for pragmatics learning?’; ‘What aspects of pragmatic competence and knowledge do learners develop in this context?’; and ‘What resources and opportunities in this context facilitate pragmatic development?’ In response to these questions, I will synthesize current findings by categorizing studies according to the studies’ treatment of context. Previous studies took diverse approaches to conceptualizing and operationalizing the study abroad context. Some studies treated it as a physical environment or categorical label (as opposed to a domestic, at-home environment), while others assessed the context for the amount of input and practice. Still others applied the small lenses, conceptualizing the context as a space for situated learning. I will discuss studies in three broad treatments of context: (1) study abroad as a black box/categorical label, (2) study abroad as exposure to input, and (3) study abroad as a site for situated pragmatic practice.

4.1 Study abroad as a black box/categorical label

Studies in this category treated the study abroad context as a black box or used it as a categorical label (as opposed to at-home), by comparing a group of learners in a study abroad program with their counterparts in a domestic, formal instructional setting (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei 1998; Matsumura 2001; Niezgodna & Röver 2001; Röver 2005; Schauer 2006; Shimizu 2009; Taguchi 2008a, 2011; Félix-Brasdefer & Hasler-Barker 2015). By design, these studies are not concerned with what actually goes on in a study abroad context. Features of study abroad – exposure, social contact, and cultural experiences – are all consolidated into this physical context, i.e., black box as opposed to a glass box, without any internal components available for inspection. Any differences between the study abroad and domestic group found in the data are used to assess study abroad effects. The judgment about the study abroad effects takes a binary format – effective or not effective, without defining the nature of the effects. In addition, with a few exceptions (Matsumura 2001; Taguchi 2008a; Félix-Brasdefer & Hasler-Barker 2015), many studies took a snapshot approach by measuring pragmatic competence a single time. This cross-sectional design calls for a question of whether the between-group differences can be indeed attributed to study abroad effects (or no effects). Groups’ pragmatic competence might be different prior to the study, regardless of their learning contexts.

These limitations become apparent in the contradicting findings about study abroad effects found in the literature. The best example is a line of replication studies of Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei’s (1998) work. Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei created the pragmatic awareness task in which learners watched video scenes and judged the accuracy and appropriateness of speech act utterances. They found study abroad effects: English as a second language (ESL) learners in the USA were able to detect more pragmatic errors than their English as a foreign language (EFL) counterparts in Hungary. Using the same task, Schauer (2006) also revealed the study abroad effects. Compared with EFL learners, ESL learners detected more pragmatic than grammatical errors, and their pragmatic awareness continued to improve during their nine-month stay in England. However, another replication study by Niezgodna & Röver (2001)

reached completely opposite findings: EFL learners in the Czech Republic detected more pragmatic and grammatical errors than ESL learners in the USA.

Using the same instrument measuring the same construct (pragmatic awareness), with the same target language, and in the same contrast of EFL and ESL, these three studies reached a conflicting conclusion to the central question – Is study abroad effective? The take away from these opposing findings is that study abroad is not a uniform construct. It is not the black box *per se* but the precise elements in the box – amount and nature of social contact, types of language practice, and individual learner characteristics – that determine learning outcomes. Indeed, Niezgodna & Röver (2001) explained that EFL learners' superior performance is because of their higher-level proficiency and motivation. The next section illustrates a way of examining these internal workings of the black box. I will present studies that analyzed the amount of language contact as an observable element.

4.2 Study abroad as exposure to input

Exposure to linguistic input and cultural practices is considered a prime feature of the study abroad context that facilitates pragmatic development. As a measure of exposure, previous studies typically analyzed the amount of language contact and assessed its effect on pragmatic development (Matsumura 2003; Taguchi 2008b; Bardovi-Harlig & Bastos 2011; Taguchi, Li & Xiao 2013; Taguchi, Xiao & Li, *under review*). Using a survey as a time-on-task measure, these studies asked participants to report the number of weekly hours using the target language. Findings generally indicate that the amount of language contact has a positive relationship with pragmatic competence, supporting the exposure effects. Taguchi (2008b) examined L2 English learners' comprehension of conversational implicatures and collected data on learners' perceived weekly hours using English in four skills. The gain in the comprehension speed (measured by response times) correlated significantly with the amount of language contact in speaking and reading. In another study, Matsumura (2003) examined L2 English learners' choice of the appropriate suggestion expression. Over one academic year in Canada, learners' performance approximated native speakers' performance, but this gain was significantly affected by their self-report exposure to English. Proficiency also mediated the link between exposure and pragmatic gains.

The positive relationship between language contact and pragmatic competence was also found in the area of formulaic expressions. Bardovi-Harlig & Bastos (2011) investigated the effects of proficiency, length of stay, and intensity of interaction on L2 English learners' knowledge of conventional expressions assessed in a US university. Intensity of interaction, measured by the self-reported language contact, had a significant effect on both recognition and production of conventional expressions. Interestingly, the length of residence had no effect, suggesting that the quality of social contact while abroad, not the sheer time abroad, matters for the development. Taguchi et al.'s (2013) findings also lend support to the link between formulaic development and language contact, but with another variable at play – initial-level formulaic competence. They measured L2 Chinese learners' ability to produce formulae over a ten-week study abroad period. They also used a survey to assess learners' perceived frequency of encounter with target formulaic expressions. No main effect of

frequency was found, but there was a significant interaction effect between the frequency of encounter of formulae-use situations and the learners' pre-test scores: the learners who started out with low formulae scores benefited more from the perceived contact with formulae situations.

Most recently, Taguchi et al. (under review) revealed a more nuanced picture of the language contact effect, along with the effect of learners' individual characteristics (i.e., intercultural competence). They found different effects of interactive and non-interactive contact on the development of speech acts among learners of Chinese in Beijing. Interactive social contact refers to face-to-face interactions (e.g., talking with friends), whereas non-interactive social contact involves media-related activities (e.g., watching TV) (Moyer 2005). Over a semester abroad, the learners gained in pragmatics, and the gain was explained by the amount of social contact. Social contact had significant direct effects to pragmatic development (path coefficient of 0.18). Intercultural competence had no direct effects to pragmatic development, but had significant indirect effects through social contact, indicating that social contact mediated effects of intercultural competence to pragmatic development.

These findings indicate that pragmatic development is, to some extent, the function of learners' target language use and their individual characteristics. Exposure in a study abroad context, characterized by features such as perceived amount of language contact, intensity of interaction, and frequency of participation in social situations, are related to pragmatic gains. However, we need to acknowledge that the evidence for this relationship is *INDIRECT*. It is indirect because the time-on-task measures are self-report questionnaires, assessing learners' perceived exposure, not their actual exposure. It is also indirect because the time-on-task reveals a sum of language contact, without isolating specific study abroad experiences that led to pragmatic gains. Essentially the quantity measure does not reveal quality of study abroad experiences in relation to pragmatic development. To address such a relationship, we need small lenses for a close-up analysis of situated pragmatics learning. The next group of qualitative studies illustrate this.

4.3 Study abroad as a situated practice

Types of social practice in a study abroad setting are so diverse that this standard term does not do justice in describing all kinds of experiences. Previous studies analyzed social practice in a variety of settings, including home stay interactions (Cook 2008; Kinginger 2008; McMeekin 2011, Shively 2013), university settings (Siegal 1995), service encounters (Shively 2011), dorm room conversations (Diao 2014), extra-curricular activities and part-time job (Taguchi 2015c), and interactions with street vendors (Jin 2012). These settings involve unique participant memberships, activities, and organizations of talk. As a result, the form of pragmatics learning occurring in each setting is unique. By analyzing these settings through small lenses, studies revealed a connection among context, language use, and development. Unlike quantitative studies reviewed above, the connection found in these qualitative studies is direct and transparent. By looking at the data, we know exactly what kind of practice happened, how it happened, and what resulted as outcomes.

To illustrate this, I will describe two studies in detail: McMeekin (2011) and Diao (2014). McMeekin analyzed homestay interactions between learners and their host family members during summer abroad in Japan. Diao's study, on the other hand, examined dorm room conversations between learners and their roommates over a semester in Shanghai. Both studies applied language socialization as a guiding theory, which claims that linguistic and sociocultural knowledge develop together through participation in routine social activities (Schieffelin & Ochs 1986; Duff 2007). Through a triangulated analysis of conversation data and observations, these studies revealed instances of explicit and implicit socialization into pragmatic norms. Most critically, both studies collected language data systematically to show how pragmatic abilities changed as a function of socialization.

McMeekin (2011) investigated L2 Japanese learners' socialization into speech styles in a homestay setting during summer. Japanese language has two speech forms: the polite form (the *desu/masu* form) and the plain form (casual form). Because classroom teaching emphasizes the polite form, learners often use the polite form as their default style, and the shift to the plain form takes some time. McMeekin showed how one participant, Mandy, gradually adapted the plain form to her repertoire through participation in a routine social practice at home – cooking. One common activity during cooking is food tasting. In this activity, the plain form is a norm because it expresses spontaneous feeling and excitement. For example, the utterance *oishii!* (It's delicious!) is uttered in the plain form to add emotion. However, initially, Mandy did not use the plain form at all during her cooking routine with her host mother. Instead, she exclusively used the polite, *desu/masu* form (*oishii desu*), which sounded like reported speech without emphatic tone. Later in the period Mandy started using the plain form. Mandy was gradually socialized into the plain form by imitating and repeating her host mother's plain form.

The excerpt below illustrates this implicit socialization. In line 1, the host mother asks a question using the plain form (*oishii?* 'Is it good?'). This is a modeling of the plain form by the host mother, but at the same time it serves as a prompt for Mandy to participate in the use of the plain form. In line 2, Mandy responds to it by repeating the mother's utterance in the plain form. The next turn is the host mother's acknowledgment, which signals that Mandy's response – and her use of the plain form – is accepted. We can see that this highly predictable, recurrent, and simple exchange about food serves as a social practice for Mandy to learn the pragmalinguistic resource embedded in this practice – the plain form to express emotion and affect.

- | | | |
|---|-------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1 | Host mother (HM): | <i>oishii?</i>
Is it good? |
| 2 | Mandy (M): | <i>un oishii</i>
Yes it's good. |
| 3 | HM: | <i>yokatta</i>
That's good. |

The next excerpt taken later in the study abroad shows Mandy's developing control of the plain form when expressing emotion. In line 1 Mandy asks a question in the polite form. But in lines 5 and 7, she switches to the plain form to express her feeling about the food

(*oishii*). Unlike the excerpt above, this style shift occurs without her host mother's prompting, indicating that Mandy's use of the plain form has become more independent.

- 1→ M: *kore wa nan desu ka*
What is this?
- 2 HM: *tabete mite kudasai kore wa piman kore hai* ((putting some on plate))
Try it and see. This is a pepper. Here.
- 3 M: *doomo*
Thank you.
- 4 HM: *tabereru?*
Can you eat it?
- 5→ M: *un oishii*
Yes it's good.
- 6 HM: *oishii?*
Is it good?
- 7 M: *hai oishii*
Yes, it's good.

By comparing conversation data around cooking collected systematically over time, we can clearly see what happened and how it happened. The student learned the plain form and its indexical meaning of feeling and affect. This learning happened by participating in the situated, everyday activity of cooking, guided by a competent member in the community. Modeling, prompt, repetition, and feedback surrounding the plain form during the routine practice of food tasting assisted the learners' acquisition of the linguistic and indexical meaning of the plain form.

In another study, Diao (2014) analyzed conversations among learners of Chinese and their Chinese roommates in a college dorm and revealed instances of peer socialization into gendered Mandarin practices with affective sentence-final particles (ASPs). In Chinese, ASPs – *a/ya*, *la*, *me*, *o*, *eh/ye* – are frequent in conversations. As Diao describes in the paper, in Shanghai these particles index social meaning of gender, because women often use them to project a cute, female persona. Diao's data illustrated how learners were socialized into this gendered practice of the ASPs by their Chinese peers in their mundane conversations.

The excerpt below is from a conversation between an L2 Chinese learner (Ellen) and her Chinese roommate (Helen) (p. 12–13). In line 9, Helen says that girls just pretend to be cute. Responding to this, Ellen clarifies her point, saying that, regardless of how they actual look, female friends usually give compliments to girls. Here, Ellen mimics their voice using the APSs as a strategy. She adds the particles *a* and *la* to her utterances with a girl-like high pitch (lines 12 and 13). These instances clearly indicate that Ellen was aware of the indexical meaning of the ASPs and used them as a tool to project a cute female image. In line 14, Helen provides backchannel cues ('right, right, right') to Ellen, which functions to acknowledge and confirm Ellen's understanding of the ASP. Here, the learner and her more competent peer collaboratively achieve socialization into the gendered speech.

- 9 HL (Helen): *dui nu" sheng youshijiu jiu hui zhuang ke'ai*
Right. Girls sometimes just pretend to be cute.
- 10 EL: *dui. danshi danshi wo de yisi jiu shi*
Right. But but what I mean is just
- 11 *bu- qishi buguan ni ni zhang de shi shenmeyang de*
No-, actually regardless of how you look
- 12→ *ni de pengyou hui shuo ah! tai ke'ai a.*
Your friends will say, 'Ah! Too cute "a".'
- 13→ *[tai %sexy% la]*
'Too sexy "la".'
- 14 HL: *[dui dui dui]*
Right.

Because of their feminine meaning, ASPs sometimes become an object for policing sexuality. This was found in conversations between a male learner (Tuzi) and his roommate (Li). Li noticed Tuzi's frequent use of ASPs and told him not to use them because he sounds 'like a gay or a woman'. In fact, Tuzi's habit of using ASPs came from his previous experience when he spent six months in southern China where ASPs are often used by both genders. Tuzi defended his use of ASPs saying that ASPs were simply a regional matter, but Li was persistent in directing Tuzi to the meaning of sexuality attached to the particles in Shanghai. These findings add to Schieffelin & Ochs's (1986) claim that, in social interactions, participants are not only learning ways of interacting, but also 'socializing each other into their particular world views as they negotiate situated meaning' (p. 165).

Both Ellen and Tuzi's dorm room interactions evolved around the dimension of gender, but these two cases diverged in the outcome of socialization. Ellen's use of ASPs was accepted and encouraged as a way of displaying female persona and mimicking female voice, but Tuzi was sanctioned against using ASPs because they were seen as a mismatch with his heterosexual masculinity. Results of these different socialization processes were evident in their divergent patterns of the ASPs use: while Ellen's ASP frequency increased by 8% from the first to last conversation at the end of the semester, Tuzi's frequency dropped by 9%.

These two studies revealed the context-learning link in a direct, transparent manner by documenting learning as it was occurring within a social practice. Specific pragmalinguistic forms and sociopragmatic norms are configured in a given social practice (e.g., the plain form as an expression of feeling, the affective sentence final particles as an index of sexuality). These forms and norms are learned through situated and guided participation in the practice.

5. Future directions of pragmatics learning in contexts

Existing studies have presented different approaches to the study abroad context. Some studies conceptualized the study abroad context as a black box or a categorical label, while others examined it as a place for exposure and practice. Still others took the 'context-as-a-glass-box approach' (as opposed to a black box), in which inner components and logic for learning are directly available for inspection.

In closing, I will present several other approaches that can help us understand the context-learning link in pragmatics. First, future research can trace changes across multiple pragmatic features in context with the explicit goal of revealing variation in developmental pace across those features. Such a study will ask: Why do variations in developmental pace occur within the same participant/participant group, being in the same physical context, over the same time period? What characteristics of context give rise to those variations? Indeed, several previous studies found that different aspects of pragmatics show different developmental pace. For instance, L2 learners' use of pragmalinguistic forms (e.g., hedges, syntactic mitigations, and bi-clausal forms in the speech act of request) took a longer time to develop than discourse-level strategies used to organize a speech act (e.g., pre-expansion in the request, such as 'Can I ask you a favor?': see Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford 1993; Schauer 2007; Ren 2012). What explains these developmental variations then? Explanations for variations can be found elsewhere – the structure and properties of the pragmatic features or characteristics of a task used to examine the features. But perhaps more context-oriented explanations can be pursued in future research. Understanding variations across pragmatic constructs could serve as an alternative way to understand the context–learning link in L2 pragmatics research.

Another future direction involves explicit application of social network analysis (SNA) to pragmatics learning while abroad. Milroy (1980) originally adopted the concept of social networks in sociolinguistic research. A social network involves a group of individuals who are connected with others based on personal relationships or shared interests. SNA allows us to examine social structures among individuals by analyzing nodes (individual actors, people, or things within the network) and ties (relationships or interactions) among individuals, as well as strength of ties. Recent studies found that the dispersion of social network (the number of different social groups within L2 learners' network) was a significant predictor of L2 gains while abroad (e.g., Dewey, Bown & Eggett 2012). SNA could serve as a useful tool to analyze domains of practice in pragmatics research. Who do learners interact with while abroad? How close is their relationship with others within social circles? Such data can be cross-examined with types of pragmatic practice available within different social groups to reveal nature and patterns of pragmatic development specific to domains of practice.

Finally, lingua franca communication and intercultural pragmatics are promising areas of future investigation in study abroad research. In previous studies, target language contact was typically associated with contact with native speakers or local members. However, with globalization, target language is more often used among multilingual/multicultural speakers than monolingual speakers. Supporting this, in Taguchi's (2015c) study of Japanese study abroad, one Chinese student showed a remarkable development in her interactional competence during a semester abroad. This development was largely attributed to her frequent participation in the self-organized multicultural group involving students from diverse cultural backgrounds. The group regularly gathered and discussed current topics in their shared language, Japanese. These findings support the benefits of multilingual communication as a space for L2 development. In the multicultural group, each member is entitled to present their views and ideas from their cultural standpoints. Learners speak Japanese to participate in the shared activity and goal, and L2 gain is likely a byproduct of this participation. These findings suggest that target language use no longer belongs to native speaker community alone. L2 learning can take place in intercultural communication among

international students. Future research in pragmatics learning in lingua franca will help us move to the new conceptualization of the study abroad context – study abroad programs as a site for multi-cultural communication.

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