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Raising and Assessing Pragmatic Awareness in L2 Academic Language Learning

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Abstract: The present paper examines the pragmatic comprehension and metapragmatic awareness of academic L2 learners, as manifested in exam scripts from a written exam specifically designed to assess students' pragmatic awareness. The exam is offered to fourth semester students of the Faculty of English Studies of the University of Athens, upon the completion of an academic language course, Genres in English, which deals with various media genres of English, mainly from newspapers and magazines. Contrary to extensive studies in pragmatics and oral communication in L2 contexts, in this paper we present our attempt to raise students' pragmatic awareness through a metapragmatic analysis of written texts. In particular, we place emphasis on written discourse reception and expect our students to be able to identify pragmatically inferred effects retrieved from a text by linking parts of the text together. This approach to teaching pragmatics engages learners in a genuine reading context requesting the reader's spontaneous reaction and contribution to the process of meaning making in L2. Our research has confirmed that pragmatics can be taught in an L2 environment. More specifically, our study shows that it is possible to raise students' pragmatic awareness in an L2 academic context by teaching them how to provide a metapragmatic analysis of newspaper and magazine texts. Concerning the factors affecting students' pragmatic awareness, we would like to argue that further consolidation through practicing with the pragmatic comprehension and metapragmatic analysis of texts appears to contribute to raising students' pragmatic awareness. Finally, it can also be argued that pragmatic awareness relates to language proficiency, as, on the one hand, cases of low pragmatic awareness are shown to be students with poor English, and, on the other hand, students with a high level of language proficiency exhibit raised pragmatic awareness even when they have only had limited practice with analysing texts.

Keywords: L2 Academic Learning, Text Force, Pragmatic Awareness, Interpretative Route

Introduction

ACCORDING TO KASPER (1997), 'pragmatic competence' can develop in learning environments by practicing, and thus enhancing, interpersonal oral communication, as manifested, for example, in inviting, offering, thanking or apologizing. In fact, existing research on the teaching of pragmatics in L2 contexts over-emphasizes speech production in the form of 'communicative' acts, i.e., social acts such as *requesting, apologizing, complaining, suggesting*, with hardly any research on interpretation of inferred meaning – with the exception of Bouton (1994) and Kubota (1995) on implicatures (for an overview, see Kasper 1997). Contrary to extensive studies in oral discourse, in this paper we discuss our attempt to raise our students' pragmatic awareness through a metapragmatic analysis of *written* texts. In particular, we place emphasis on written discourse reception

and expect our students to be able to identify pragmatically inferred effects retrieved from a text by linking parts of the text together.

In this direction, it is assumed that normal adult L2 non-native learners are already fully pragmatically competent in at least one language, and thus, instruction draws on *prior knowledge* (Kasper and Rose 2002: 22). As a consequence, our preliminary research rests on the assumption that a division between *Pragmalinguistics*, i.e., “the resources for conveying communicative acts and relational or interpersonal meanings”, and *Sociopragmatics*, i.e., “the social perceptions underlying participants’ interpretation and performance of communicative action” (see Leech 1983; Thomas 1983, in Kasper 1997) is incongruous with our aim to develop awareness of how specific linguistic markers link (by giving rise) to intended or non-intended pragmatic effects (e.g., favouring, hostile, mocking, wavering author attitudes). In this respect, in any instance of successful communication, the former domain (*pragmalinguistics*) presupposes the latter (*sociopragmatics*), and examining them as two distinct research domains may misleadingly suggest that two distinct processes are involved in spontaneous on-line interpretation. In fact, sociopragmatic assumptions are, for the purposes of this study, used as a contextualizing factor in facilitating pragmalinguistic processing (see section on *The Data*).

The present paper examines academic non-native learners’ pragmatic comprehension and metapragmatic awareness as manifested in exam scripts from a written exam specifically designed to assess students’ pragmatic awareness. This exam is offered to fourth semester students of the Faculty of English Studies of the University of Athens, upon the completion of the academic language course entitled *Genres in English*, which deals with various media genres of English, mainly from newspapers and magazines.

Table 1: *Genres in English*/4th Semester Language Exam Structure

	Total Marks	Text size (input)	Expected language production	Duration
Reading	30	500- 600 words	words, phrases, short sentences, a short paragraph (60-80 words)	60 minutes
Language Awareness	30	300-400 words	1 text (200 words)	60 minutes
Writing	30	300-400 words	1 text (300 words)	60 minutes

The focus of this discussion is the analysis of the *Language Awareness* part, the second part of the exam (see Table 1), aiming to contribute to research on the analysis and design of pragmatic assessment tasks, an area which is rather underdeveloped in academic contexts. Our paper specifically addresses the following research questions:

1. do students manage to retrieve relevant pragmatic effects from full-length newspaper or magazine texts – e.g., do they manage to retrieve the writer’s ironical and rejeftful, or praising attitude?
2. do students present the linguistic markers in the text as itemized lists in the form of a typology, or as evidence linked to specific pragmatic effects retrieved?

3. do preparatory written tasks in the form of course assignments have an effect on raising students' pragmatic awareness as manifested in the final written exam part?

Pragmatic Awareness

How pragmatics should be taught is an issue addressed over the last decade with questionable effects on actual learning practices, or textbooks (for an overview, see Gilmore 2007). Part of the problem rests with the fact that research into learning pragmatics has primarily dealt with a single facet of 'communicative competence', i.e., speech act recognition or production. In this direction, the bulk of DiscourseCompletionTask-based work restricts research into short verbal exchanges, often at the level of single utterances. Not surprisingly, this approach to pragmatic learning has become manifest in textbooks too. In this direction, a number of inadequacies are observed in the relevant literature. For example, textbooks are commonly designed based on intuitive assumptions of authors rather than empirical evidence on type or frequency of data in real-life contexts of use (see Bouton 1996 on misrepresentation of invitations in natural language vs. textbook). More importantly, emphasis on explicit and linguistically encoded language deprives learners of the benefit of engaging in interpretation of genuine inferentially retrieved meaning (Bouton 1990, 1999). Even in attempts to teach the interpretation of implicatures, the latter are 'retrieved' at the level of single-utterance, as in the example below:

A: How about going for a walk?

B: *Isn't it raining out?* (Bouton 1996: 7)

As artificial and isolated parts of discourse, such examples can be better seen as an illustration of 'pragmatic implicature' used in introductory courses to Pragmatic Theory. They can be hardly seen as representative of naturalistic discourse, and hence as reliable learning tools for the diversity and range of implicit meanings conveyed in real-life situations.

How pragmatics is taught depends on how pragmatic awareness is defined. In L2 learning environments, the notion of pragmatic awareness largely refers to *understanding* of the successful public performance of a speech act (see DuFon 2003 on gift giving routines). 'Understanding' may involve keeping diaries and dialogue journals, analyzing the same routine in the learners' own culture and comparing it to the target speech act, or observing videotaped instances of the speech act in question (DuFon 2003). In this respect, pragmatic awareness goes beyond the notion of pragmatic competence, i.e., the comprehension of oral language in terms of speech acts and conversational implicatures (see Thomas 1995; Kasper 1999; Rost 2002).

According to Thomas (1995: 22), "making meaning is a dynamic process, involving the negotiation of meaning between speaker and hearer, the context of utterance (physical, social and linguistic) and the meaning potential of an utterance". The 'meaning potential of an utterance' points to the fact that speaker meaning may be differently interpreted by hearers. Specifically, speaker meaning is seen by Thomas as retrievable on two levels (a) utterance meaning, which is determined by assigning sense and reference to individual lexical items in context, and (b) force, which is any inferrable meaning assigned to the utterance again in context (see Thomas 1983; 1995; Tzanne, 2000). Of the three types of 'force' identified in the relevant literature, 'illocutionary force' is similar to Speech Act Theory's 'illocutionary act' and concerns, for example, the speaker's intent to praise or criticise someone. The second

type of force, 'interpersonal force', originates in Halliday's (1970) 'interpersonal function of language' and relates to face considerations while producing discourse and to interpersonal relationships that develop in the course of an interaction among the interlocutors. Examples of interpersonal force can be the speaker's intent to tease someone or to produce an ironic comment in conversation. The third type of force is 'discoursal force', which refers to language being constructed as a text, but also to speaker's intent concerning the organisation and management of a conversation.

While 'force' is the overall pragmatic effect retrieved, our notion of pragmatic awareness involves, but also goes beyond, 'sense and reference' and 'force' as determined above. Fully developed pragmatic awareness enables readers to inferentially recover linguistic meaning towards resolving ambiguities, ellipsis, linguistic underdeterminacies (see Carston 2002) and a range of relevant presuppositions and implicatures *in order to* retrieve overall 'force'. In this sense, we consider force to be assigned not only to individual utterances, but also cumulatively to a sequence of utterances that is to the whole text (Tzanne 2001). As a result, we examine students' uptake of the text producer's force (e.g., criticism / praise of a particular person) as this manifests itself in the sequence of utterances composing a text. Moreover, we expect our students to be able to identify the possible repercussions (i.e., *pragmatic effects*) of the text and retrace their interpretative steps by presenting patterns of linguistic evidence from various parts of the text.

Concerning the text producer's intended force, for the purposes of this work, this force is what *we*, the researchers, perceive the text's force to be. At present, our interpretation of force is the result of our own reading of the text, while in future research in the area we also intend to use a group of 'expert judges' (competent readers) whose (range of possible) interpretations we will use as a yardstick against which to assess our students' readings in terms of 'acceptable' interpretations. In particular, given that there is not a single meaning potential, since readers may retrieve different *relevant pragmatic effects* depending on their background knowledge, needs and interests (on intended vs. non-intended pragmatic effects, see Ifantidou 2009), we consider a reading to be 'acceptable' if it falls within the range of possible meanings that can be assigned to a text. We therefore accept that a text can be, for example, *heavily* or *moderately* critical against Gordon Brown, but, based on the linguistic evidence provided, we do not accept answers that characterise the same text as highly or moderately *praising* Gordon Brown. As observed in our exam and classwork practices, irony is a force sometimes difficult to agree on, since we have often disagreements in class as to whether a text should be read as literal or ironical. In this case, we eventually consider both answers as acceptable as long as students have justified their interpretation with convincing metapragmatic analysis. It seems, therefore, that identifying the *illocutionary* force of a text is a more straightforward process than identifying the text's *interpersonal* force. As a result, concerning interpersonal force, we must stress that, as we are primarily interested in assessing our students' ability to interpret a piece of written work in a meaningful way, and not in their retrieving a single meaning, we have often accepted readings different from ours on condition that they were presented meaningfully and supported convincingly through a robust metalinguistic and metapragmatic analysis of the text.

For the purposes of the fourth semester language course *Genres in English*, we expect our students to read the text, understand and report not so much on the author's literal meaning (by assigning sense and reference to the sentences of the text), but mainly on *pragmatic meaning* beyond the level of what is said. In this sense, we are testing the students' ability

to link together the force of individual utterances in the text and arrive at an interpretation of the force of the whole text as product of a cumulative process. It is our contention though, that mere identification of pragmatic effects (e.g., illocutionary force, irony, humour) is not an indication of fully-developed pragmatic awareness. Our approach goes beyond Schmidt's (1995: 30) concept of 'noticing', i.e., "conscious registration of the occurrence of some event", and 'understanding', e.g., realizing that addressing higher status interlocutors by means of certain forms is rude. In Schmidt's (1995: 30) words,

"In pragmatics, awareness that on a particular occasion someone says to their interlocutor something like, "I'm terribly sorry to bother you, but if you have time could you look at this problem?" is a matter of noticing. Relating the various forms used to their strategic deployment in the service of politeness and recognizing their co-occurrence with elements of context such as social distance, power, level of imposition and so on, are all matters of understanding."

Our notion of pragmatic awareness is different in that it involves the learner's not only 'understanding' but also explicating the link between linguistic indexes and pragmatic effects retrieved by readers, e.g., how modality markers help the reader construe a *wavering* (author) attitude towards a point of view X. As such, pragmatic awareness requires not only metalinguistic competence, but metapragmatic and metacognitive abilities too (see Ifantidou forthcoming). In this respect, pragmatic awareness can be measured by assessing learners' written metapragmatic accounts of how linguistic indexes yield specific pragmatic effects.

As already stated, contrary to existing research which focuses on aspects of production, (for an overview, see Kasper 1997), our work focuses on reception (comprehension of written texts) by looking at evidence from (a) academic L2 learners' pragmatic comprehension and (b) metapragmatic awareness manifested in their written production of English. The working definitions of a and b above are:

- (a) *pragmatic comprehension*: the ability to arrive at an acceptable interpretation of the force of a text by identifying pragmatically inferred effects,
- (b) *metapragmatic awareness*: the ability to verbalize the link between linguistic indexes and relevant pragmatic effects as retrieved by readers (see Ifantidou forthcoming).

As we understand it, a reader exhibits pragmatic awareness when s/he is able to

1. correctly identify pragmatically inferred effects in a text which contribute to the creation of a stance towards a topic or a character, and
2. verbalize the link between linguistic indexes and the pragmatic effects s/he has retrieved.

In the following sections, some of the preliminary findings of our research will be discussed pointing to interesting correlations between, on the one hand, language proficiency and (development of) pragmatic awareness and, on the other hand, preparatory work (in the form of written assignments) and (assessment of) pragmatic awareness.

Raising Pragmatic Awareness

In an attempt to raise our students' pragmatic awareness, we worked with them on the analysis of newspaper and magazine texts by using functional grammar (Halliday 1994) which can provide valuable insights into the force of a text and the attitude of its producer vis-à-vis the issue discussed. For example, we taught our students how to analyse texts using actional transitivity processes which relate to issues like responsibility and agency and provide clear indications as to whether the person presented as agent is to bear full responsibility for her/his actions. Another example of the kind of analysis we performed in class relates to passive voice and its function(s) in a text. To this end, we tried to identify whether passive voice was used, for example, in order to conceal the agent of an action and thus invalidate his/her contribution to the topic presented (in which case a rather unfavourable attitude may be constructed in the text towards this person), or in order to present the protagonist of the story as recipient of others' actions, unable to react, and perhaps victimised (in which case a sympathetic, favourable attitude may be constructed in the text towards this person).

In addition to functional grammar, we discussed issues of cohesion (Halliday and Hasan 1976) in order to help our students identify linking parts in a text. We paid particular attention to lexical cohesion as a means of revealing patterns of meaning which contributed to the construction of the text's cumulative force. Finally, retrieving pragmatic assumptions in the form of *presuppositions* and *implicatures* was also explicitly taught in the context of both mini-scenarios and full-length texts.

In the course of the semester, as further consolidation of the material covered weekly in class, we assigned students two written take-away tasks (course assignments) similar in format to the exam questions they would get in the *Language Awareness* part of their final written exam. Students obtained extensive feedback on their marked written tasks.

In order to assess our students' pragmatic awareness, we explicitly instructed them to proceed with their analysis of a given text by (a) providing their interpretation of the force of the text, (b) identifying the linguistic devices that helped them retrieve the relevant pragmatic effects, and (c) linking these devices with their interpretation by presenting them convincingly as evidence for their interpretative claims. Viewed in this way, (a) and (b) relate to one's pragmatic comprehension, while (c) relates to her/his metapragmatic awareness.

The Data

The exam scripts analysed here are from the exam period of June 2008, at which time approximately 400 exam scripts on *Genres in English* were collected. From these, we initially excluded the scripts that lacked answers to Part B of the exam, as some students had not addressed that part. In accordance with our third research question (see *Introduction*), we further classified the scripts into scripts that had been produced by students who had completed both assignments, and scripts that had been produced by students who had not completed any assignments. As a final step of collecting data and for the purposes of this initial phase of our research, we randomly selected 10% of the scripts from each category, which amounts to 40 scripts in total (25 from students with two assignments and 15 from students with no assignments completed).

The text our students analysed in the *Language Awareness* part of the exam concerned a demonstration – protest against the war in Iraq that took place in London during George

Bush's visit to the city. Students sitting the exam were given the news report below together with useful (for non-English readers) background information concerning the sociohistorical context of the report, i.e., key events, people and places referred to in the report. In this way, we attempted to cater for inadequate relevant sociocultural knowledge.

Police clashes with anti-war protesters in Whitehall

Downing Street yesterday rejected any suggestion of a rift between Gordon Brown and George Bush over troop withdrawals from Iraq, as the US president arrived in the UK for what is expected to be his final visit to the country before he leaves office.

Bush began his UK tour with tea with the Queen at Windsor Castle and a Downing Street dinner hosted by Brown and attended by Rupert Murdoch. But just as during his previous trips to Britain since 2003, Bush's visit drew large crowds of protesters angry at his foreign policy adventures. Numbers may have been fewer than those that greeted Bush on his November 2004 visit to London, when anger over the Iraq war was still raw. But every generation was represented yesterday, from babies wearing "Arrest Bush" stickers, to Tony Benn who left behind his parliamentary career to "spend more time in politics." "The war in Iraq was a war crime," said Benn. "Over 1 million Iraqis have died and the Americans are spending \$400m a day on it while people are starving in Ethiopia".

Last night, protests turned violent as a formidable deployment of riot police prevented demonstrators from getting into Whitehall. The trouble began after a few cans and placards were lobbed over police lines. Officers hit protesters with batons as they surged forward. Several protesters were wounded in the clashes and 25 people were arrested.

Suzanna Wylie sustained a bloody head wound in the melee. "I'm angry that the police have treated us like we're rioting, and we're not," she said. "I've been on lots of demonstrations before, and every one of the Stop the War demonstrations have been peaceful; this time, because Bush is here, because of his own security arrangements, they won't let us demonstrate. If they let us demonstrate, there would have been none of this."

Stop the War Coalition, one of the organisers, added that "this was very predictable. If they had allowed us to deliver our letters of protest to Downing Street, none of this would have happened".

The Metropolitan police said they were seriously disappointed by the irresponsible and criminal action of those who have challenged the police.

Our students had to analyse this text in order to identify whether the attitude of the producer of the report was favourable or unfavourable towards the protesters. Our own unanimous reading, which we took as the 'correct' interpretation of the text was that the text was favourable towards the protesters. An answer which would exhibit raised pragmatic awareness would involve the following (indicative) points.

Firstly, with respect to the naming devices used in the text, we observe that George Bush is called either with his full name ('George Bush') or with his surname only ('Bush'). Nowhere in the text is he referred to with his title (President), which may indicate some degree of disrespect towards him. On the other hand, some protesters are referred to by full name ('Tony Benn', 'Susan Wylie'), which singles them out as individuals and may result in

bringing them closer to the reader, while the word ‘babies’, used to name a group of protesters, brings with it strong connotations of innocence associated with the protesters.

Furthermore, concerning transitivity processes of agency, we observe, on the one hand, that the police appear as agents / actors of violent actions (‘officers hit protesters’) with protesters being the affected participants (‘officers hit protesters’, ‘several protesters were wounded’, ‘25 people were arrested’). Interestingly, an instance where protesters themselves become actors of violent actions is cleverly backgrounded in the text with the aid of passive voice (‘a few cans and placards were lobbed over police lines’). Concealing the protesters and foregrounding the officers as actors clearly shows the favourable attitude of the text producer towards the former group.

Moreover, it is observed that in the text it is only protesters who speak directly to the reader in order to present their just cause (relational process: ‘the war in Iraq was a war crime’) and good intentions. It is reasonable to argue that the use of direct speech by individual protesters foregrounds these characters and their opinion in the mind of the reader who may thus sympathise with them and take their side.

Finally, the repetition of the phrase ‘they won’t *let us demonstrate* / if they *let us demonstrate*’ in the speech of one of the protesters creates cohesion in the text and implies that these people need permission from the authorities in order to act. This emphasises the protesters’ position as powerless participants, which again, may make the reader view them with a sympathetic eye.

Assessing Pragmatic Awareness

In accordance with our first research question, we initially focused on students’ interpretation of the text’s force and found that the overwhelming majority of them (87%) had identified the text’s force correctly, thus agreeing with us that the text producer expressed a favourable attitude towards the protesters. Only a small minority (13%) said that the text was critical towards the protesters. Most of the students who belonged in this category were students who had not done any course assignments during the semester.

However, by scrutinising the exam scripts, we observed that the students’ correct interpretation was not always linked with relevant linguistic devices or appropriate interpretative links. In other words, students seemed to have arrived at the text producer’s attitude by taking different paths to interpretation. We thus realised that our analysis could not focus on interpretation or linguistic devices alone, but it had to discuss interpretation, devices and the link between the two as one interpretative process with many different instantiations, which we called routes to interpretation.

The table that follows presents the interpretative routes that emerged from our data.

Table 2: Student's Interpretative Routes Manifesting (a) Pragmatic Comprehension and (b) Metapragmatic Awareness

Interpretative routes	Interpretation of text's force	Linguistic devices	Verbalisation of link between devices and interpretation
1	Correct	Relevant	appropriate link
2	Correct	Irrelevant	inappropriate link
3	Correct	Relevant	no link
4	Correct	Irrelevant	no link
5	Incorrect	Relevant	inappropriate link
6	Incorrect	Irrelevant	no link
7	Incorrect	no devices	no link

Students who took the first interpretative route identified the force of the text correctly and presented relevant linguistic devices as convincing evidence to support their interpretation. An example of this route is the following.

In this article, the writer is clearly favourable towards the protesters. First of all, in terms of transitivity processes, the writer presents the protesters as affected participants of transactive actional processes with the police being the agent (e.g., officers hit protesters). This presents the protesters as victims and sufferers and invites the reader to sympathise with them.

Students who followed interpretative route 2 identified the force of the text correctly, but presented irrelevant devices as evidence and consequently failed to create appropriate links to their interpretation. The following excerpt illustrates this route.

The writer of this article is favourable towards the protesters who participated in the demonstration against Bush. Firstly, the naming devices he uses to refer to Bush are his full name (George Bush) and Bush, and when he refers to the police he uses the word "officers". These naming devices show respect.

The third interpretative route was taken by students who identified the text's force correctly and presented a list of relevant linguistic devices without making any links between these devices and their interpretation. The following text is a case in point.

In this article, the writer adopts a favourable attitude towards the demonstrators. There are many lexicogrammatical features used: relational processes (the war in Iraq is a crime), there is a variety of themes (Bush, The trouble, Officers) which are grammatical subjects. As far as transitivity and agency are concerned, there are some transactive actional processes (officers hit protesters).

Students who took the fourth interpretative route were successful in identifying the text's force, but failed to present relevant devices or link them to their interpretation. An example of this route is the following.

The writer of this article seems to be favourable towards the protesters who participated in the demonstration against George Bush. The writer uses many adjectival descriptions such as violent protests, formidable deployment, several protesters. Additionally, regarding modality, the modal verb 'would' appears at the end of the article and the verb 'may' at the beginning of it.

Interpretative routes 5, 6 and 7 were taken by students who failed to identify the text's force correctly, presented irrelevant devices and made inappropriate or no interpretative links. These routes were mainly identified in exam scripts which presented many language problems, as can be seen in the following example illustrating route 5.

It can be seen from the article that the writer is not in favour of the protesters. This critical attitude can be seen through many things. First of all in the naming part he tends to use the word protesters. He refers to two of them by their exact name, "Tony Benn" and "Suzanna Wylie". That way he creates the protesters' image as people without name. His syntax also he uses active verbs mainly (is, let, happened) to show this whole action that exists between protesters and officers.

Examining the interpretative routes our students took in relation to pragmatic awareness, we consider students who took the first route to be the ones with raised pragmatic awareness, and students who took routes 6 and 7 to exhibit almost no pragmatic awareness at all. In addition, we find students who took interpretative routes 3 and 4 to lack metapragmatic awareness, while those who followed routes 2 and 4 to have difficulties with pragmatic comprehension.

Overall, our data yield interesting findings concerning the relation of students' pragmatic awareness to the material we provided for consolidation and to their level of language proficiency. Firstly, we found that over half (55%) of the students whose scripts we examined had taken the first route to the interpretation of the text, which, as stated, is undoubtedly evidence for raised pragmatic awareness of the cumulative force of a text (on cumulative force, see Tzanne 2001). Most interestingly, the vast majority of these cases (90%) were students who had completed both assignments. It seems, therefore, that providing students with additional practice tasks does result in raised pragmatic awareness. This confirms Kasper's (1997) claim that pragmatic competence can develop in learning environments through practice.

The rest of the scripts that belong in this category were produced by students who had not done any assignments, but displayed high level command of the English language. In this respect, our preliminary findings indicate that students with high proficiency in English are almost certain to exhibit pragmatic awareness as well, regardless of whether they have had extra practice with analysing texts.

In general, we believe that the good work produced by these students is an indication that, contrary to what has been observed in other studies in the area of teaching pragmatics (Bouton 1990, 1999), our approach offered students the opportunity to interpret a genuine inferentially retrieved meaning.

A very small number of students (4%) took the second interpretative route and, despite identifying the force of the text correctly, provided irrelevant linguistic devices and failed to link these devices to their interpretation in an appropriate and acceptable way. This is a

rather surprising finding, in that these students are among the ones who had completed both assignments. However, it is not totally unexpected, since the specific students obtained very low marks for this preparatory work.

Route 3 was taken by few students (12%). By listing the relevant devices and not analysing their function in relation to the interpretation of the text's force, these students proved to be good at pragmatic comprehension, but failed to show any metapragmatic awareness. We consider this failure to relate to lack of practice in the relevant area, as almost half of these students had not completed any assignments.

Several students (20%) identified the text's force correctly, but presented a list of irrelevant devices in their scripts and made no attempt to link these devices to their interpretation (route 4). We believe these students to have had a 'lucky guess' concerning the force of the text and consider them to have hardly any pragmatic awareness. Almost all of these students (97.5%) belong in the category of students who had not completed any course assignments, which indicates that this extra practice may have helped some students with issues of pragmatic comprehension and awareness.

The rest of the students (9%) failed to identify the text's force correctly. Only few of them attempted to present some relevant (to the incorrect interpretation) devices and link them to their understanding of the text, while the rest provided irrelevant or no devices at all and no links. Most of these cases were students who had not done any course assignments and/or students who exhibited low English language proficiency in their exam scripts. The latter observation, together with the aforementioned case of students who did very well, despite not having done assignments, indicates that one's pragmatic awareness in L2 is closely related to her/his level of proficiency in this second/foreign language (for a thorough discussion on the relation between pragmatics and language proficiency in L2 learning see Kasper and Rose 2002: 159ff.).

Conclusions

The present paper differs from other studies in the area of teaching pragmatics in L2 contexts in the following respects: firstly, contrary to studies in oral communication with emphasis on speech production, this study assesses learners' *reception* of texts, where meaning is constructed cumulatively and not on the basis of isolated utterances performing particular speech acts. Additionally, our work focuses on learners' *written* output, as a means of providing reliable insights into their pragmatic and metapragmatic awareness. Finally, this paper addresses the issue of L2 learners' interpreting inferred meaning, as the approach reported here gives them the opportunity to gain insights from how a diversity of implicatures are retrieved from authentic, full length texts, rather than from isolated, artificial short utterances.

Our research has led to a number of interesting conclusions. First and foremost, it is confirmed that pragmatics can be taught in an L2 environment. More specifically, our study shows that it is possible to raise students' pragmatic awareness in an L2 academic context by teaching them how to provide a metapragmatic analysis of newspaper and magazine texts.

Concerning the factors that seem to have affected our students' pragmatic awareness, we would like to argue, albeit tentatively, that further consolidation through practicing with the pragmatic comprehension and metapragmatic analysis of texts appears to contribute to raising students' pragmatic awareness. This is shown by the fact that students who completed both

course assignments exhibited a raised pragmatic competence compared to those who completed no assignments.

Finally, it can also be argued that pragmatic awareness relates to language proficiency, as, on the one hand, cases of low pragmatic awareness were found to be students with poor English, and, on the other hand, students with a high level of language proficiency exhibited raised pragmatic awareness even when they had only had limited practice with analysing texts.

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